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5 CENTS.

FAME AND FORTUNE

WEEKLY

STORIES OF BOYS WHO MAKE MONEY.

HOW HE GOT THERE; OR, THE PLUCKIEST BOY OF THEM ALL.

By A SELF-MADE MAN.



"This time, young man, I think I've got you dead to rights," said the Spaniard, with a look of gratified malice. "In less than five minutes those oil-soaked portieres will be a mass of flame. Where then will you be?"

Fame and Fortune Weekly

STORIES OF BOYS WHO MAKE MONEY

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How He Got There;

THE PLUCKIEST BOY OF THEM ALL.

By A SELF-MADE MAN.

CHAPTER I.

THE MAN WITH THE BLACK BEARD.

"Is Mr. Scott in?"

Lee Templeton, a bright-looking boy of seventeen, messenger and clerk for Rutherford B. Scott, dealer in stocks and bonds, on the ground floor of No. — Wall Street, was crossing the small reception-room from the little counting-room to his employer's private office, with a bundle of papers in his hand, when he was saluted with the foregoing question.

The person who addressed him was a well-dressed, dark-featured man of perhaps thirty years, with piercing, jet-black eyes, and a small, silky black moustache, who had just entered the office.

The boy took him to be a well-to-do Spaniard.

He carried a small satchel in his right hand, and upon the little finger Lee noticed a heavy gold, black-enameled ring, the design of which was a coiled snake, a big diamond being imbedded in its flat head.

The flash of the diamond attracted the boy's attention,

and its owner, noticing the direction of his gaze, frowned, while a malignant gleam leaped into his eyes, but it was gone in a moment.

"Yes, sir," replied Lee, with his customary politeness. "If you will take a seat I will tell Mr. Scott you wish to see him. Will you oblige me with your name?"

"Manuel Suarez."

Lee entered Mr. Scott's private office and, after laying the papers on his employer's desk, announced the visitor.

"Tell him to walk in," said the broker.

The Spaniard entered the inner room.

"Mr. Scott, I believe?" he said, seating himself beside the desk.

"Yes, sir. In what way can I serve you?"

"You purchase bonds, I think?"

"I do."

"I wish to sell fifteen Reading \$1,000 first mortgage 5's, market value \$1,170, in all \$17,550."

The Spaniard opened his satchel, produced the bonds, and laid them on the desk.

Mr. Scott took them up, one by one, and looked them over carefully.

They appeared to be genuine to his experienced eye, but as the amount was large, and his visitor a perfect stranger, it was his invariable rule in such cases to request that the securities be left with him a short time for verification.

He so informed his visitor, who smiled and nodded assent.

"I will give you a receipt, fully specifying the bonds," said the broker. "Call about two o'clock."

Mr. Scott immediately rang for Lee, and the Spaniard passed him on his way out.

Suarez stepped into a cab that was waiting for him and drove off.

"Lee," said Mr. Scott, when the lad entered his presence, "take these securities, fifteen \$1,000 Reading first mortgage 5's, down to Blank & Hooley, attorneys for the road, and have them certified."

"Yes, sir."

The boy took the bonds into the counting-room, put them into a small leather handbag, the mouth of which was secured by a strap running through a series of metal rings, and started on his errand.

Lee Templeton was an unusually smart boy for his years.

He had been working in Wall Street now for about two years, and enjoyed the confidence and esteem of his employer, Mr. Scott.

He lived with his widowed mother and pretty sister, May, in a modest flat in Harlem.

The family being in moderate circumstances, May also was a bread-winner.

She was very proud of her stalwart brother, while Lee was quite certain there wasn't another girl in the world who could hold a candle to his sister.

There was also another person who entertained the same opinion of May.

That was Sam Hawkins, Lee's particular friend, who lived close by the Templeton flat, and who, likewise, worked in Wall Street for a brokerage firm.

Sam was a jolly, good-natured sort of boy.

Most fat boys are, and Sam tipped the scales at over 200 pounds.

As Lee came out of the Scotts' door he met Hawkins, who was entering the building on an errand, on a run.

A tall, sanctimonious individual, with a book under his arm, issued from one of the offices on the floor at that moment.

He was going his rounds making collections for the heathen.

Judging from the expression on his face he hadn't been very successful.

He didn't notice the approaching projectile until too late to avoid contact with Sam.

The result was, he was bowled over, with his legs and arms spread to all points of the compass, and alighted, kerflop, on the polished marble floor, just as Hawkins fetched up against the wall.

"I beg your pardon, sir," gurgled Sam, realizing the mischief he had done.

The lanky individual glared at him.

"Thou art a son of Belial, and wilt come to the gallows one of these days," he answered, angrily.

Then he picked himself up, recovered his subscription book and hurried from the building.

"What are you laughing at?" Sam demanded, as Lee, grinning all over his face, came up and offered his hand to assist him to his feet.

"I was laughing at your imitation of an animated cannon-ball. You didn't do a thing to that collector for the foreign missionary fund."

"How do you know he's a collector for the foreign missions?"

"He was in our office awhile ago soliciting subscriptions for the benighted pickaninnies of the Congo."

"I think he's a fraud. He called me a son of somebody, and said I'd come to the gallows. Just as if I could help running against him. Why didn't he look out where he was going?"

"Why didn't you look out where you were going awhile ago and not bump into and lay him out?"

"I didn't see him till I was on top of him," grinned Sam.

"Well, let it go at that. When I tell May to-night the way you glided over this corridor she'll have a fit," chuckled Lee.

"Oh, I say, don't tell her!" protested Sam.

"Why not?"

"I don't want her to think I'm such a guy as all that."

"I wouldn't miss telling her for nine dollars."

"If you do, the next time I upset you I'll fall on you and there won't be anything left of you but a grease spot," frowned Hawkins.

"Well, run along, sonny. I've got to go down to No. 1 Broadway, and I can't waste any more of my precious time chinning to you. I'll see you at lunch-time."

"All right," replied his fat chum, and the boys parted company.

Lee was a smart walker, and was not long going down to the big office building which faced Bowling Green and the Battery.

There was a cab standing in front of the main door,

where the boy entered, which looked like the one in which the Spaniard was driven away from Mr. Scott's office.

Lee entered one of the elevators.

"On which floor are Blank & Hooley's offices?" he asked the elevator man.

"Eighth."

"Then just drop me off there, will you?"

The elevator stopped at the eighth floor.

"Straight ahead, first corridor to the right, then to the left," said the man, as Lee stepped out.

"Thanks, old man, I'll remember you in my will," Lee replied, as the door was shut with a bang and the elevator shot skyward.

Then the boy started down the main corridor.

He darted around the first turn to the right and—found himself suddenly gripped by the throat by a dark-featured man with a heavy black beard, who hissed through his teeth:

"Drop that bag or I'll choke the life out of you!"

CHAPTER II.

THE BLACK-ENAMELED SERPENT RING.

Lee dropped the bag, not because he had been ordered to do so, but because he could not help it.

His hands instinctively went up to his throat in an effort to tear away the strange man's grasp upon his wind-pipe.

The effort was a vain one.

The vise-like grip only tightened around his neck like the coils of an anaconda, and he gasped frantically for air.

His eyes bulged from their sockets.

A red mist gathered before them, but through it he saw the baleful gleam of a pair of black, glowing eyes, like those of the basilisk, glowering into his very brain.

For an instant the thought occurred to him that he had seen those eyes before, then the agony of suffocation drove all thought from him.

He struggled desperately, as a strong boy will for his life, and nearly succeeded in freeing himself.

But his strength was too badly handicapped by the relentless pressure on his throat, and he gradually succumbed.

His tongue protruded from his mouth, his face turned a livid gray, and then his head dropped over on his shoulder.

As he lost consciousness the stranger in the black beard released the pressure of his fingers, and was in the act of

laying the boy down on his back, when a door was opened and closed in the adjoining corridor and footsteps sounded on the stone flooring.

They were approaching, and discovery was imminent.

But the stranger found that the boy had a death-like grip on his fingers.

With an oath and a fierce wrench he tore his hands free, not noticing in the hurry of the moment that the heavy ring he wore on his little finger remained in the unconscious boy's grasp.

Grabbing up the bag, he sprang around the corner into the main corridor, and darted toward the stairway beside the elevators, just as the persons who had disturbed him came into view of the scene of the crime.

"Hello!" exclaimed one of the well-dressed gentlemen who were on their way to the elevators. "What's this? A boy has fallen in a fit. Here, Williams, help me take him back to the office."

The other gentleman assisted in raising Lee and supporting his unconscious form back the way the two had come.

They carried him into an office, the door of which was marked private, and laid him upon a leather lounge.

"Get some water and a towel, Bailey," said Williams. "I've got a flask of brandy in my desk. I'll run and fetch it. I'm afraid the lad is in a bad way. Look at his clenched hands, and the froth on his lips."

The two gentlemen hastily worked over Lee, at first without any encouraging results, but after Williams had succeeded in forcing a portion of brandy between his teeth, the boy began to show signs of returning animation.

At length he opened his eyes, with a fluttering sigh, and his hands mechanically went to his throat, while a spasm of pain swept his features.

Then he struggled to a sitting posture and gazed about him in a bewildered manner.

"Where am I?" he gasped, huskily.

"You'll be all right in a moment, my lad," said Bailey, encouragingly.

Something dropped from his fingers to the carpet.

Williams picked it up and looked at it.

It was a heavy gold, black-enameled ring, made to resemble a coiled snake, and in its repulsive-looking flat head was sunk a full carat diamond for an eye.

"A curious and valuable ring, Bailey," said Williams, showing it to his partner.

"It is, indeed. Quite odd, upon my word. Came off the boy's finger, eh? Must be an heirloom."

"Something has happened to me," said Lee at last, as his senses reasserted themselves. "Ah, I was choked!"

"Choked!" exclaimed the two gentlemen, in surprise.

"Yes. I was set upon suddenly by a black-bearded man as I turned out of the main corridor. Where's my bag?" he asked, starting to his feet and looking about him.

"Your bag?" asked Bailey. "I didn't see any. Did you notice one, Williams?"

"No; there was none in the corridor. Of that I am certain."

"Then I have been robbed!" cried Lee, almost frantically.

"Robbed!"

"Yes. I had a small leather bag with me. It held fifteen Reading \$1,000 bonds I was taking to Blank & Hooley's office. I must find the thief. How long have I been here?"

"We found you about seven or eight minutes ago unconscious in the side corridor, and brought you in here to revive you, thinking you had a fit."

"I had no fit. I was choked almost to death by a dark-featured man with a black beard. It must have been he who took the bag."

"I am afraid this is a serious case," said Bailey to his associate, Williams. "Who is your employer, my lad? I'll ring him up on my 'phone, and give him warning of the situation."

"I work for Rutherford B. Scott, No. — Wall Street."

"All right. Just wait a moment."

"The man who robbed you has doubtless made his escape from the building by this time," said Williams, after his partner had disappeared into the next room.

"I am afraid he has," admitted Lee, in a dejected tone.

"You say you have lost fifteen \$1,000 Reading Railroad bonds?"

"Yes, sir."

"That's a serious loss, my lad," said Williams, sympathetically. "But I dare say your employer has a memorandum of their numbers, and he will be able to take measures to prevent the thief from realizing on his plunder. By the way, this is your ring, I believe. It dropped off your finger just as you revived. It's an odd-looking bit of jewelry in its way."

"That isn't my ring," said Lee, as he took it in his hand.

"Not yours? Why I saw it drop out of your hand."

But Templeton didn't hear that remark.

He was gazing with a look of fascinated interest on the odd circlet.

Like a flash, he remembered he had seen a similar ring on the little finger of the Spaniard, Manuel Suarez, as he stood in the reception-room of Mr. Scott's office not an hour ago.

He had caught the Spaniard's eye, too, as he answered his question, and now it dawned upon the boy that the eyes of Manuel Suarez were very like the fierce orbs which had burned themselves into his brain as the cruel fingers were choking the breath out of his body.

Was there any connection between the two men?

If there was, then he had a clew to the thief who had assaulted him and taken the bag containing the bonds.

At that moment Bailey re-entered the room.

"I have communicated with Mr. Scott. He will be here right away," he said.

"The boy says that ring isn't his property," said Williams.

"No?" replied Bailey, lifting his eyebrows in some surprise.

"No," said Lee; "it must belong to the man who robbed me."

"Do you really think so?" asked Bailey, with sudden interest. "In that case it may prove a valuable clew in running the rascal down."

"I believe it will," answered Lee, who thought he saw a way to that end.

"How does your throat feel now?" inquired Williams.

"Kind of rocky; but it is gradually getting better."

"While we're waiting for your employer, you'd better go over to that sink and rub it well with brandy, slightly diluted—that will help it some," said Bailey.

Lee followed his advice, and had just finished the operation when Mr. Scott made his appearance.

"What does this all mean, Lee?" asked the broker, turning to his messenger, whose pale face and shaky appearance denoted that something had gone wrong with him. "I was informed over the wire—by one of these gentlemen, I presume," glancing at Bailey, who nodded—"that you had lost the bonds."

"Yes, sir," replied the boy, in a downcast voice.

"I understand that you were assaulted and robbed."

"Yes, sir."

"In this building?"

"Yes, sir."

"How did it happen? This is a very serious matter," said Mr. Scott, gravely.

Lee at once told his story, not without some difficulty, for his throat was still painful, and the three gentlemen were much impressed by the terrible experience through which the boy had passed.

"Do you think you could recognize that man again?" asked the broker.

"I am pretty sure I could, sir; but," added Lee, eagerly, "I am beginning to think the man was disguised."

"Disguised? I don't understand you."

"Because, sir, there is a peculiar thing about this outrage."

"Explain."

"Did you notice that the Spaniard who left the bonds with you wore a big ring of enameled gold, in design a coiled snake with a diamond for an eye, on the little finger of his right hand?"

"I did. Its oddness rather struck me."

"Would you know it again, sir?"

"I certainly would."

"Does this look like it?" and Lee handed him the ring which had come into his possession in such a peculiar way.

"It is the very ring!" cried the astonished broker. "Or at least its mate. How came you to get this, Lee?"

CHAPTER III.

FIGURING ON THE CASE.

"I have no recollection of how it came into my hands, Mr. Scott," replied Lee; "but this gentleman," indicating Williams, "says he saw it drop out of my fingers as I was coming to my senses on that lounge, and as the last thing I recall during my struggle with the black-bearded man was a desperate grip I had upon his fingers in a fruitless effort to tear them away from my throat, I believe it must have slipped off his finger, unnoticed by him, when he was releasing his hands after I had become unconscious."

"That sounds reasonable," nodded the broker. "It seems a remarkable coincidence that both these men happened to wear a ring of such an unusual design."

"Almost too remarkable, I should say," spoke up Williams, drily.

"I have a strong suspicion that a deliberate attempt to defraud you out of the value of those bonds is on foot, sir," said Bailey, wagging his head, sagely, and looking at the broker. "I have known of such a thing to be worked successfully."

"I am beginning to think so myself," replied Mr. Scott.

"The Spaniard who left the bonds in your hands got your receipt for them, of course?" continued Bailey.

"Certainly."

"What is their market value?"

"Seventeen thousand, five hundred and fifty dollars."

"Quite a respectable amount. If my idea is the right one, I take it that the man Suarez figured upon your send-

ing the bonds out to be verified before you made such a large purchase from a stranger, and laid his plans accordingly. The fact that he lay in wait for your messenger on this floor, in the very corridor through which the boy had to pass to reach the offices of Blank & Hooley, shows that he had informed himself in advance of the most likely place the bonds would be sent."

"Your reasoning seems quite sound," admitted Mr. Scott.

"On that hypothesis the scheme thus far has been successful," went on Bailey. "It now remains for the rascal to reap the fruit of his crime if he can. To do that he must present the receipt and request either the return of the bonds or their value in money."

"Will he dare do that after losing his ring?" asked Lee, with much interest. "Will he take the chance of its figuring against him?"

"That will depend, I should imagine, upon his nerve. He may judge that his ring did not attract any particular attention when he was in the office negotiating for the sale of the bonds."

"No," answered Lee, shaking his head, "he noticed that I looked at it, for I saw him frown and change the position of his hand on the satchel."

"That makes a difference, certainly," said Bailey. "He may delay presenting the receipt until he can get a new ring made. That will greatly complicate matters. Should he make this move you will undoubtedly have considerable difficulty in trying to connect him with the assault in this building."

"But such delay would cast suspicion on him, wouldn't it?" asked Lee.

"A clever man can readily invent a plausible excuse for his inability to call according to appointment. I advise you to call a detective into the case at once, Mr. Scott. You know as well as I do that the theft of the securities does not relieve you of your responsibility to the Spaniard, who may, after all, be innocent of any connection with the dark side of the affair."

Mr. Scott nodded, showing that he appreciated the force of Bailey's argument.

"You seem to have a very clear idea of the situation, sir," he said, "and I thank you for the interest you have shown in the matter. I am also very much obliged to you both, gentlemen, for your attention to my messenger. You will confer another favor by not saying a word to any one else about this unfortunate occurrence, as it might defeat the ends of justice if the facts were published in the newspapers in their present incomplete form."

The two gentlemen assured the broker they would keep silent about the case.

"Thank you," replied Mr. Scott. "Now, Lee, we will make a call on Blank & Hooley, and notify them of the loss of the bonds. I have a memorandum of the numbers with me."

The offices of the Reading Company's attorneys were only a few steps away.

Mr. Hooley was in, and was greatly astonished to learn of the outrage which had been perpetrated so close to their door.

He also advised that a detective be immediately employed on the case.

One of his clerks was requested to take a copy of the broker's memorandum.

"I will communicate at once with the secretary of the company in respect to the stolen securities, and measures will at once be taken to prevent the thief from realizing upon them."

The first thing the broker did when he and Lee returned to the office was to call up a well-known detective agency, whose specialty was Wall Street cases.

The manager promised to send one of his best men around right away.

In a short time the office boy announced "Mr. Johnson."

The visitor was an alert-looking person, attired in a neat business suit and a brown derby hat.

His age was perhaps thirty-five and he was smooth-shaven.

He was one of the shrewdest detectives in the financial district.

Lee was called into the conference and told his story in a clear, concise way.

"It is a plant, without a doubt," said the detective, promptly, when all the facts were in his possession. "You are both prepared to take oath, I presume, that this ring," holding up the snake circlet, "or at least one resembling it, was on the finger of the gentleman who called here with the bonds for sale?"

"Yes, sir," replied Lee, and Mr. Scott nodded.

"Very good; that's something to begin with."

"I can swear that the black-bearded man had the eyes and complexion of the Spaniard who gave his name as Manuel Suarez," added Lee.

"How about his clothes?" asked Mr. Johnson, sharply.

"I could not identify his dress, as he came upon me so suddenly. However, I am sure he had a soft hat very like the one worn by the Spaniard."

The detective shook his head.

"I doubt if your evidence would hold under cross-ex-

amination. When a person is being choked into insensibility he is hardly in a condition to take an accurate observation of his surroundings."

"I should know those eyes again if I lived to be one hundred," maintained Lee. "They were as much the Spaniard's as that ring."

"The difficulty will be to prove that fact to the satisfaction of a jury," replied the detective. "By the way, Mr. Scott, did you examine those bonds carefully before you sent them out of your hands?"

"I did."

"Your chief business, I believe, is buying and selling securities."

"Yes, sir."

"Then, in your opinion, the bonds were genuine?"

"Such was my belief."

"And yet they may have been cleverly forged ones," intimated Mr. Johnson, with a shrewd glance at the broker.

"I have not heard of any Reading bonds having been forged."

"Perhaps not. These may have been the first presented."

"If spurious, the fact would almost certainly have been detected at Blank & Hooley's. Mr. Suarez must have known before offering them for sale that no broker would buy them until satisfied of their genuineness."

"Well, wouldn't this account for the bold and successful attempt made to prevent the bonds from reaching Blank & Hooley's?"

"I don't quite catch your meaning, Mr. Johnson."

"Assume they were forged—the work was done clever enough to deceive you and secure a receipt for fifteen genuine bonds. That was all the man wanted. Then he proceeded to recover the securities, in order to wipe out all evidence pointing toward their spuriousness. He succeeded. Very good. He now holds your receipt for \$17,550 worth of supposedly real bonds. What are you going to do about it?"

"I see," admitted the broker. "As the case stands, it can make no difference whether the bonds were genuine or not. I am responsible for the amount of the receipt."

"That's the game exactly. I am satisfied the bonds were forged. We have had several cases of late of forged bonds having been successfully worked off on credulous buyers, not all of them brokers by any means. In some cases spurious securities have been found to have been substituted for the genuine ones through the connivance of crooked clerks who have vanished before their operations were detected. The Government Secret Service people are hunting for the gang at the back of these operations. This Spaniard may be one of the crooks."

"Well," said the broker, "I leave this matter in your hands. This Suárez is due to call at three."

"I will be on hand to meet him, but I don't think he will come to-day."

"Because he has lost the ring?"

"Yes. He will take no chances until he shall have had a duplicate made."

"And then?"

"We will try and attend to his case," said the detective, rising. "I shall now continue my investigations at No. 1 Broadway. Good day."

At three o'clock exactly Mr. Scott's telephone rang and, putting the receiver to his ear, he was astonished to find that some one purporting to be Manuel Suarez was at the other end of the wire.

The Spaniard said it was impossible for him to call according to arrangement, as important business demanded his immediate presence in Philadelphia; but he would present himself as soon as he had returned, probably by the end of the week.

"He is making a colossal bluff to gain time," commented Mr. Scott, as he hung up the receiver.

CHAPTER IV.

IN THE HANDS OF THE ENEMY.

When Lee Templeton left the office for home late that afternoon, and started down Wall Street to take a subway train at the Hanover Square station, a man, who had been standing well back in the shadow of the entrance of the building opposite, came out, crossed the street, and followed a short distance behind him.

He was a dark-complexioned, foreign-looking individual, dressed like a petty steamship officer.

A pair of sharp, black eyes gleamed from beneath his blue cloth cap, while the greater part of his face was covered with a plentiful growth of side whiskers.

He trailed after Lee down the subway stairs, was right behind the boy when he bought his ticket, and followed him into the same car.

Lee changed to a Lenox Avenue express at the Brooklyn Bridge station, and the man with the side whiskers did the same, boarding the same car, as before.

The boy got out at 125th Street, and the party with the side whiskers did likewise.

He followed Lee up the avenue to 128th Street and saw him enter a plain-looking flat-house.

Taking a note of the building, the man with the side whiskers walked to a neighboring drugstore which had a pay-telephone booth, and called up somebody on the wire.

Then he strolled down to 125th Street and entered a restaurant.

Twenty minutes later he came out on the sidewalk with a choice cigar between his teeth, strolled across the street and entered the "Penny Hippodrome," where he spent half an hour among the phonographs and moving-picture boxes.

Just as he came out at the Lenox Avenue entrance a cab drove up and stopped close to the curb.

The man with the whiskers deliberately walked over to it.

Somebody inside opened the door, then the man spoke to the driver and got in.

The vehicle turned around and slowly rolled up to 128th Street, turned the corner and came to a stop before the flat where the Templetons lived.

The man who had come in the cab—a short, thick-set individual, smooth-shaven, alighted—entered the vestibule of the flat, located and rang the Templeton bell.

The door was opened, but the man continued to push the button until Lee came downstairs to see what was the matter.

"Is your name Templeton?" asked the man.

"Yes," replied Lee.

"You are wanted at the 125th Street Police Station."

"What for?" asked the boy, in surprise.

"To identify a man arrested for assaulting you and getting away with a bag containing Reading bonds this morning at No. 1 Broadway."

"Oh! All right," replied the unsuspecting lad. "Wait till I get my coat and hat. I'll be back in two minutes."

Lee told his mother where he was bound, and then hurried downstairs.

"I've brought a cab," said the stocky man, as soon as the boy appeared. "We'll be over there in a jiffy."

"Whereabouts on 125th Street is the station?" asked Lee.

"Near Amsterdam Avenue. All right," he said to the driver, as he stepped in after Lee, who had already found another person in the vehicle.

The jehu whipped up his horses and turned up Lenox Avenue, instead of down.

"You're going in the wrong direction," exclaimed the boy.

"I guess you're dreaming," said the man, rudely.

"Well, you're not going toward 125th Street."

"You needn't worry."

"But I thought you said——"

"You shut up," cried the man with the side whiskers, drawing a revolver and pressing it against his temple. "If you utter another word I'll blow the top of your head off."

Lee was thoroughly startled, as any boy of his age would be, at the sudden change in the situation.

With the cold muzzle of a revolver pressing against his head, he decided that it would be the part of prudence to submit as gracefully as he could.

Two men and a gun presented odds against which he dared not rebel.

So he subsided into silence and inactivity.

"That's right," grunted the man with the side whiskers, approvingly. "I see you're a sensible boy. No harm will come to you, so long as you do as you are told."

Nothing more was said, and the cab rolled straight on up the avenue toward the Harlem River, while the boy did a lot of thinking.

Who were these men who had inveigled him from his home, and what purpose was behind it all?

He had never seen them before, so far as his recollection served.

Whither were they taking him?

Surely some terrible mistake was being committed.

He wanted to cry out and demand an explanation, but the menacing attitude of the revolver overawed him.

Reaching 145th Street the cab was driven as far west as Seventh Avenue, into which it turned and continued on, circling the little park at the junction of 155th Street viaduct and Central Bridge, and crossing the bridge over the river into Jerome Avenue.

For perhaps two miles the cab followed the avenue, then it turned up a dark, cross street, unpaved and with only an apology for a sidewalk, finally coming to a halt before an old-time and seemingly deserted mansion standing a hundred feet back from the street line.

The stocky man got out of the vehicle first.

"Come," he said, gruffly, gripping Lee tightly by the arm, "get out."

The boy obeyed.

The man with the side whiskers followed.

He handed a bill to the driver, who immediately whipped up his horses and drove back toward Jerome Avenue.

"Now, then, step out, young man," he said, sharply, in the tone of one used to command and accustomed to be obeyed.

As they passed through the gateway and walked up the

long gravel path to the house, Lee noted that they were in a very thinly-settled section of the Bronx.

The big mansion looked ghostly and uninviting in the gloom of a dark night.

What had once been a spacious lawn was now overgrown with weeds and tangled shrubbery.

In fact, the whole place wore a look of utter neglect, and was running to seed.

The man with the side whiskers pulled a bell-knob, and a harsh jangle sounded somewhere in the depths of the house.

Presently steps were heard inside, then the stout door was unlocked and opened a few inches, as far as a big chain-guard would permit.

"Who's there?" asked a voice from the darkness.

"The Captain," replied the man with the side whiskers.

The chain was unhooked, and they entered the mansion.

Lee found himself in utter darkness, piloted along what he judged to be a wide hall by the stocky man, who had never once released his grip on his arm.

Then a door was opened ahead, and the three paused in a dimly-lighted entry, with a pair of uncarpeted stairs leading to the floor above.

"Now, Mattocks," said the man with the whiskers, "take the boy upstairs and lock him in the room over the kitchen."

"I should like to know why I have been brought to this place?" asked Lee of the speaker.

"You will learn in good time," replied the man, sharply, motioning to the stairs.

"Step lively," said Mattocks, urging Lee toward the stairs.

Lee felt obliged to obey the command.

With Mattocks close at his back, he ascended one flight.

"Turn to your left," ordered his conductor.

The boy turned as directed.

"Straight ahead."

He walked forward about a dozen feet, like a prisoner being led to a cell.

"Open the door on your left," said Mattocks.

Lee turned the handle, the door yielded and the man pushed him into a room, the floor of which creaked and resounded to their tread, for it was without covering of any sort.

Mattocks struck a match, dimly revealing a comparatively bare, square apartment.

A common, round-bellied lamp stood on a small deal table in the center of the room.

The man lighted it, and after a sharp glance at the windows, where the wooden outside shutters were closed in and barred, he turned on his heel and left.

Lee heard him turn the key in the lock, then his heavy footsteps retreated along the corridor, and died away down the stairs.

"This is a nice pickle I'm in, I don't think," muttered Templeton, looking about his prison. "What'll mother and sis think when I don't return to the house? They'll send to the police station and find out I was not sent for, nor wanted there. Then they'll begin to worry. If I fail to turn up, they won't sleep a wink all night. It's a shame! I'd like to know why I've been brought away out here."

There were two chairs, one on either side of the table; a cot-bed that looked as if it was in use, a small cylinder stove with a coal-hod beside it, an old-fashioned washstand with a tin basin and pitcher, and a plain-looking dresser which supported a cracked mirror.

There was a closed door in one corner, which Lee guessed concealed a closet.

That was all.

"I might as well sit down as not," thought Templeton, as cheerily as the circumstances would allow. "It is clear my name seems to be mud just now. I wonder what I'm up against? Is the bond affair at the bottom of this? It must be. Something tells me that the man with the side whiskers is Manuel Suarez. I caught a gleam of a black eye, though not very clearly. Perhaps he thinks I have the ring in my possession, and he is taking this method to recover it. He will be disappointed."

Lee, for want of something better to do, pulled open the drawer of the table.

It was filled with a variety of odds and ends, among which he noticed a wide chisel without a handle.

The boy fumbled about among the things in an aimless way, while his thoughts were busy with the future.

Finally he heard footsteps approaching along the corridor, the door was unlocked and opened, and the man with the side whiskers entered the room.

CHAPTER V.

WHO HOLDS THE ACE?

The man advanced to the table with a soft, cat-like tread, sat down and fixed the boy with his eye.

They were the eyes of Manuel Suarez.

Something lurked in their black depths that inspired the boy with fear.

Something which betrayed the cold, cruel, relentless nature of the man himself.

Something that said he would stop at nothing to achieve his purpose.

"Look here, Templeton," the words came short and snappy from his lips. "I'm a man of few words. Have you ever seen me before?"

Lee was going to say "Yes," but concluded not to, so he remained silent.

"Answer my question!" menacingly.

"I don't see why I should," answered the boy, doggedly. "You are no friend of mine, or you and the man you call Mattocks would not have enticed me away from my home and brought me out here in the Bronx."

"How do you know you're in the Bronx?" asked the man, sharply.

"I know we crossed the Harlem River by Central Bridge and came up Jerome Avenue. I was not asleep."

Lee's coolness seemed to disconcert his questioner somewhat.

"We brought you here for a purpose," said the man, after a slight pause, during which he studied the boy's features attentively. "We believe you know more about certain things than is good for you to be acquainted with. We believe you think the man who called at your employer's office yesterday morning and left with him certain bonds for sale is the same man who afterward assaulted you on the eighth floor of the Broadway building and took those bonds from you. Is not that the fact?"

"What makes you think so?"

"You are not here to ask questions, but to answer them, do you understand?"

The man with the whiskers smote the table angrily.

"You can't make me answer unless I choose to do so," replied Lee, stubbornly.

"Can't I?"

There was a world of menace in those two words.

They sent a thrill through the boy's nerves.

He decided that it was a dangerous matter to fool with this man.

"Well," he said, grudgingly, "it is the fact."

"I thought so. Do you know who I am?"

"I think you are Manuel Suarez."

"That is exactly who I am," and Suarez deftly removed the false side whiskers. "You recognize me now as the person who called at Scott's office yesterday morning. You saw me in the reception-room, didn't you?"

"I did."

"You noticed the heavy gold ring I wore on the little finger of my right hand?"

Lee hesitated.

Suarez seemed to read his thoughts.

"I see that you did. That ring came into your possession afterward in the Broadway building, didn't it?"

"Yes."

"You are quite satisfied I am the man who assaulted you?"

"If I wasn't before, the events of to-night have convinced me that you are."

"I am not going to deny it," said Suarez, with a peculiar smile. "Where is that ring now?"

"It is safe."

"I want a straight answer," demanded the Spaniard, with an ominous glitter in his eyes.

"It is in the hands of a detective employed by Mr. Scott."

"Much good it will do him," with a sneer. "Unless he has your evidence at his beck and call he can't prove that that ring was ever worn by me."

"Oh, yes, he can," replied Lee, triumphantly.

Suarez looked a bit startled.

"How can he?"

"Mr. Scott noted that ring himself while you were in his private office."

An ugly frown gathered on the Spaniard's countenance.

"You are certain of that?" he hissed.

Lee now regretted he had been so candid in his talk.

"Are you going to answer me?" gritted Suarez, in a tone which admitted of no evasion.

"I heard him say so," replied Lee, hesitatingly.

Evidently the Spaniard had not expected this revelation and was much disturbed by it.

At that moment the house bell jangled down in the kitchen, and the sound came up quite plainly to their ears.

Manuel Suarez got up and started for the door.

"Mr. Suarez," said Lee.

"Well," answered the Spaniard, pausing and regarding the boy fixedly.

"Do you mean to keep me a prisoner in this place?"

"Perhaps."

"For how long?"

"As long as I see fit."

"It is an outrage!" groaned the boy, indignantly.

"You are the most important witness against me in this bond affair," replied Suarez, curtly. "With you out of the way, nothing can be proved against me."

"Don't be so sure of that. You can make nothing out of your crime, for the receipt you hold will not be recognized unless presented by you in person. If you appear at the office you will be arrested."

"On what charge?" sneered the Spaniard.

"Conspiracy to defraud, and murderous assault and robbery."

"And the only evidence against me, you being out of the way, is a ring which, given time, I can almost duplicate at a jeweler's. Tell me, my young friend, how long would such a charge hold in court?"

There was a triumphant gleam in his black eyes which bespoke the confidence he felt in his position.

Lee felt proportionately discouraged, for he read in the man's reply an indefinite imprisonment for himself, since the rascal's safety and success lay in his absolute disappearance from the stage.

Suarez's sharp eyes observed the lad's distress and easily read its meaning. His lips curled with an evil, satisfied smile.

Then he left the room, locking the door after him, and his soft footfalls presently died away down the staircase.

For some minutes Lee sat like a statue in the chair, turning over in his mind the unpleasant conclusion which the interview with the Spaniard had given rise to.

Argue the matter as he would, he saw he was clearly under the thumb of a most inexorable and desperate villain.

It was not alone the idea of a long imprisonment which confronted him.

A far more dreadful thought confronted him.

His life even might be in danger.

Dead men tell no tales, while live ones may give no end of trouble.

As soon as his absence was noted, and his mother had reported at the office the strange manner of his disappearance, he knew Mr. Scott would leave no stone unturned to find him.

Not only because he took a personal interest in him, but because there was the sum of \$17,550 at stake.

Detectives would be spurred to do their best by the promise of rewards.

The result might be that Suarez, finding himself pushed into a tight place, would have him quietly disposed of in some effective way.

It was a horrible thought, but one which the boy couldn't get away from.

The newspapers were full of just such examples.

In Boston a dismembered body had but recently been fished out of the bay.

In Philadelphia a man's body had been found mangled on the tracks of the Reading Railroad, under suspicious circumstances.

In the eastern section of the Bronx a girl had been found strangled, after being hid a week in the bushes.

There were a dozen other instances he could recall, and

yet in every case the murderer or murderers had not been discovered.

Lee shuddered, for the eyes of the Spaniard were the eyes of a man capable of committing any crime in the calendar—a man subtle enough to reduce murder to a fine art.

CHAPTER VI.

THE MYSTERIOUS PICTURE.

Lee Templeton, however, was not the kind of boy to be overcome by a discouraging outlook.

"I don't propose to sit still and be treated as a puppet—to be kept a close prisoner, and in the end, perhaps, be done up, if such a course should seem advisable to Manuel Suarez—not if I can help myself. And I mean to help myself. I read somewhere that God helps those who help themselves, and I mean to test the adage. The man or the boy who comes out on top are the ones who put their shoulders to the wheel. That's my idea in business. All the more reason I should put it into practice now when my position is so desperate. Manuel Suarez hasn't a bit more conscience than a hungry snake. Supposing he wanted the life of a boy who stood in his way as I do? He'd take it, with as little consideration or remorse as I would kill an obnoxious fly buzzing about my ears on a hot day. He's a bad man, and the sooner he and I part company the better for me."

The fire of a new resolution came into the boy's eyes.

He pulled off his shoes, then rose from the chair and tried one of the windows.

It wouldn't budge.

Then he saw it had been securely nailed up.

The other window was in the same condition.

"That won't stop me if I can't find an easier way out," he grinned, grimly.

He walked softly over to the door in the corner of the room and tried the knob.

It yielded to his touch, and pulling it open he found, as he had supposed, that it communicated with a closet—an empty one.

No, not quite empty.

A second look showed him a dark-lantern on the upper shelf.

He brought a chair over so that he could reach it, for he thought it might prove useful.

As he took it down something else followed.

It was a black mask.

Feeling around the upper shelf with his fingers they pres-

ently closed upon an article that proved to be a slung-shot.

"These evidently belong to a professional crook," muttered Lee. "Well, this implement is a good article to defend one's life with at close quarters. I'll keep it," and he shoved it into his hip-pocket. "I shouldn't be surprised if this old house is the rendezvous of the counterfeiting gang Mr. Johnson spoke about. If it is, then Manuel Suarez is the king-pin, all right."

Lee concluded to leave the dark-lantern on the shelf for the present, after he had ascertained that it was ready for service.

He closed the closet door and returned the chair to its former position.

There was nothing else to look at but an old-fashioned oil panel on the wall facing the table.

Lee hadn't noticed it before, but now standing in front of it he saw it was the painting of a head.

It was covered with dust and not very distinct, but there was something about it which impressed him unpleasantly.

He couldn't tell what that was, but he felt that he didn't care to look at it.

He sat down at the table and wondered what time of night it was.

The house was as still as death.

Having nothing to do, he began to be conscious of a nervous restlessness stealing upon him.

Suddenly he found his eyes drawn involuntarily, as it were, to the dusty panel on the wall facing him.

Something like an electric shock ran through his body, followed by a strange tingling sensation.

He stared at the picture as if fascinated.

The lamplight threw a strong shadow all about the panel, but at the same time illuminated the thin film of dust which rested upon the picture itself.

It seemed as if some strange and horrible face was staring full upon him from behind a thin veil—a face whose expression was absolutely startling.

He could hardly persuade himself that it was not a real face thrusting itself out of the dark oaken panel.

"B'gee! I can't stand this!" exclaimed Lee, fretfully. "I'm not superstitious, but I'm bound to say that picture, whatever it is, gives me a creepy feeling."

He began to walk up and down the room in his stocking feet.

But the mysterious influence which oppressed him seemed rather to increase than diminish.

He had never felt so nervous in his life.

He could feel a clammy moisture breaking out in the palms of his hands and on his forehead.

The very shadows in the corners grew into life and mo-

tion under the flickering flame of the lamp wick, and he could almost imagine they were about to dart out and seize upon him.

"Great Scott! This will never do!" he cried at length. "If there's anything wrong about that picture I'm going to know it. The reflection of the light on the dust must be the cause of all this."

He pulled out his handkerchief and dragging a chair over to the wall he mounted, and resolutely, though with a sensation of repugnance, brushed the dust from the picture.

Then he stepped down and looked at it squarely.

He could not repress a shudder as he gazed.

Evidently it was an old Italian masterpiece, truly horrible in its realism.

It represented a head just severed from the body.

The face protruded from a plain background in the strongest relief, and with wonderful truth of coloring.

The expression was that of agony—the agony of intense bodily pain, and its ghastliness was something weird and terrible.

Lee gazed upon it with a kind of fascination, which, coupled with the intense stillness of the old house and the night, produced a chilling, creepy influence that fairly turned his blood cold.

Although Lee had the reputation of being the pluckiest boy in Wall Street, this picture quite unnerved him.

At last he tore his eyes away from it, turned the lamp down and went over and threw himself upon the bed.

But in spite of all he could do he found himself looking in the direction of the picture, now lost in the shadows, but which still seemed to follow him with its menacing and suffering eyes.

"This is something fierce!" he muttered, as he tossed and twisted himself upon the bed, in his vain effort to blot the awful phantom from his mind. "It must be long past midnight by now. I wish I could get asleep."

But he couldn't.

At the end of half an hour he started up as wide awake as he had ever been in his life.

"That picture is simply knocking me endwise," he exclaimed, desperately. "I'll be a wreck in the morning if I can't get rid of it somehow. By gracious! I'll dig it out of the wall and smash it to bits. The fellow that painted that must have done it in a fit of delirium tremens. I never saw such a horrible painting in my life. I wouldn't have such a thing in my house for a farm."

Nerving himself for the task he had determined on, he advanced to the table, turned up the light again, and pulling out the drawer he searched for and drew out the chisel.

With this he advanced upon the panel.

The terrible face, as if it had divined his purpose, glared down menacingly at him.

But Lee had keyed his courage up to the sticking point, for he was thoroughly resolved to do up that picture.

"I'll paralyze you, confound you!" he said, shaking the implement at the panel. "You've been giving me the creeps, now I'll give you a taste of cold steel and see how you like it."

His first intention was to try and shave the paint off the wood and thus destroy the design completely.

Then he changed his mind and decided he would dig out the panel from the wall and put it into the closet.

"It is probably a masterpiece in its way, so I ought not to destroy it."

He began operations at one corner of the wood.

But he soon found that he couldn't make any progress at all.

The thing fitted so snugly that he couldn't possibly get the point of the chisel under the wood.

After working away for a time he desisted almost in despair.

"I never saw such a cantankerous old thing in all my life," he said, in a vexed tone.

Then his eyes lighted on the pictured face once more, and it seemed to him as if a horribly sarcastic leer, a kind of ferocious satisfaction, had gathered about the mouth of the painting, just as if it exulted at the failure of his efforts.

"Confound you!" cried Lee, angrily, smiting the side of the panel with his fist, "you shan't get the best of me if it takes all——"

He stopped and stared, almost fell off the chair with surprise and, we may say, consternation, for the panel had moved of itself, and was slowly opening outward—inch by inch—as if it had suddenly become possessed of life.

CHAPTER VII.

THE HOUSE OF MANY SECRETS.

Lee quickly recovered from his momentary alarm and watched the slowly opening panel with a feeling of surprise.

Evidently this was one of the secrets of the old house.

He had read about such things in stories of ancient dwellings, but never imagined a practical demonstration of the fact would ever occur to him.

But here he was actually being introduced to a secret cupboard, the existence of which was probably unknown to the present occupants of the building.

The door swung out to an angle of 45 degrees and then stopped.

"Gee!" exclaimed the boy, "I don't wonder that horrible face was painted on this panel. That of itself was enough to scare any one from attempting to investigate it close enough to suspect that it covered a secret closet. If I hadn't accidentally struck the concealed spring which released the catch I never would have got on to it myself. I wonder if there's anything in the cupboard? It looks large enough to hold a small bed. I'll get the lamp and take a look."

As he got down from the chair it occurred to him that perhaps the dark-lantern would do better, being easier to handle.

So he went to the closet and got it.

Lighting it and opening the slide which covered the bull's-eye he again mounted the chair, and dexterously pulled himself up into the secret cupboard.

At a first glance the place appeared to be empty, though thickly incrustated with cobwebs and the dust of years.

"A fellow can almost stand up in this hole in the wall," he muttered. "I guess this must have taken the place of a safe in the good old times. It isn't a bad place to stow away one's valuables when you come to look at it. In fact, I think it's better than a safe, for its existence would never be suspected by any one not in the secret. It's all to the good."

As Lee turned the lantern from point to point the flashing circle of light rested for a moment on what seemed to be a pile of dust on one of the shelves.

"What's that?" mused the boy, looking closer.

He put his hand upon it.

It was not dust but a solid substance.

He picked it up and shook it.

The dust fell away from it and revealed a small bundle carefully done up in brown wrapping paper and securely tied.

It was not heavy.

"I'd give something to know what's in this," Lee said to himself, with a good deal of curiosity.

He debated whether to tear it open at once or not.

He decided not to do so.

"It will keep, for it's easy to carry."

Thus speaking, he slipped it into his pocket and continued his investigations.

There was not another thing in the cupboard.

"I wonder what that knob is for?" he said, observing a dusty metallic button at one side of a series of narrow shelves.

He took hold of it and pulled, but with no result.

"Gee! I thought maybe I was going to find another secret cupboard; but it doesn't seem to be there for any purpose that I can see. It won't pull, twist or——"

"Push," he was going to say, but didn't, because as he did happen to push something remarkable happened.

The shelves folded up and the whole side of that portion of the wall slid down out of sight, as if by magic, and a black void stared the boy in the face.

"Jumping jew's-harps! as Sam would say. What's this I've blundered on?"

The glow of the bull's-eye revealed a narrow flight of stairs, six of them, leading down to a passage which apparently ran between the outer and inner wall of that side of the house.

"This seems to be a house of mysteries," ejaculated the astonished boy. "I am having adventures to burn. Well, I'm going to see where that leads to. Maybe it will enable me to get away from the clutches of Manuel Suarez."

Before proceeding, he concluded it would be the part of wisdom to get his shoes.

So he returned to the room and tossed them into the cupboard.

"I may as well take this chisel along. It might come in handy. I'll turn out the lamp. Then if Suarez comes back unexpectedly he may think I've turned in on the bed, and will let things stand as they are till morning, by which time I hope to be miles from here."

Before he touched the lamp he swung the panel partly back and took another look at the severed head.

It had lost its terrors now for Lee.

"You old nightmare," he said, grinning at it, "it is possible you've done me a good turn. If so, I shall always be grateful to you in spite of the touch of the horrors you gave me awhile ago."

Then he put out the light, swung himself up into the recess in the wall and pulled the panel to.

It shut with a sharp click.

Lee ran the bull's-eye light up and down the inside edge of the closed panel, but could see no sign of a spring.

The whole thing was as tight as a drum.

"Say, this wouldn't be funny at all if I wanted to get back into that room once more. The passage may be blocked, or if there is a secret panel or door at the other end I may not be able to find the spring, then where would I be at? I would be in the consomme for fair."

However, Lee didn't see any reason for alarm at present.

Picking up his shoes and the chisel he descended the short flight of steps and then proceeded along the narrow passage beyond.

At the end of twenty feet he came to a blank wall.

At the same moment his sharp ears caught the sound of voices on his right.

"There must be a room there," he mused, running the light along the wall, which appeared to be quite solid. "I'll bet that's Suarez and one of his associates, chinning. How I'd like to hear what they're saying!"

But he couldn't understand a single word.

All he could distinguish was an indistinct murmur of conversation.

He walked forward and back to see if he could find a secret panel.

There was no sign of one, yet he noticed that only in one spot could he hear the sounds from the next room.

"The wall is certainly thinner here than elsewhere," he argued. "There must be a difference in the thickness of the partition. That can only mean that there is a panel. These things are certainly cleverly arranged. They fit closer than a glove."

He ran his hand up and down and across the smooth surface, but with no success.

"This beats the Dutch!" he said at last. "I hate to let a thing like this beat me. Besides, it may mean the only avenue of escape for me in the end."

He began all over again, but with more care, going over every inch of the wall in that particular spot.

Suddenly a slight click came to his ear and two feet of the wall slid noiselessly out of sight somewhere, and he found himself standing in an opening looking into a big, square, elegantly furnished room.

Lee gave a slight gasp of surprise and dismay, for at a table a few feet away sat Manuel Suarez in conversation with a well-dressed man, whose back was turned to him.

The boy instinctively started back, and as he did so the panel shot back into its place again.

At least it would have done so, but Lee's right hand had accidentally grasped one side of the opening and the panel came to a stop against his fingers, without, however, hurting him.

This left a crack about three-quarters of an inch wide, through which shone the lamp light that illuminated the room.

For a moment or two Lee stood fairly paralyzed by the quick change which had taken place in front of his eyes, then he began to realize the situation, and was quick to take advantage of it.

"This is the greatest ever," he breathed.

With a slight effort he found the panel could now be moved to admit of as large or as small an opening as he desired.

"It's a wonder Suarez didn't catch sight of me, for he is facing this way," muttered Lee.

He applied one eye to the crack and looked into the room.

The Spaniard and his companion were in earnest converse, and every word came distinctly to the boy's ear.

What Lee overheard during the next fifteen minutes sent a thrill of excitement through every fiber of his being.

CHAPTER VIII.

A POINTER WORTH A MILLION.

"I tell you, Suarez, I've got the biggest thing that was ever given away in Wall Street," said the man whose face Lee couldn't see.

"You tell it well, Fletcher," replied the Spaniard, rolling a cigarette between his fingers and then lighting it.

There was a slight sneer in his tones, which the other was quick to catch on to.

At the mention of the name Fletcher, Lee started slightly.

He knew of one Fletcher in the financial district—Morris Fletcher—but of course this man could not be he.

That gentleman was secretary of the Reading Coal & Iron Co., and was considered eminently respectable.

Therefore, it was far from likely that he would be found in the society of a crook like Manuel Suarez.

"You seem to doubt my word," said the person addressed as Fletcher, with a gesture of annoyance.

Suarez smiled sarcastically as he blew a cloud of smoke in rings from his lips.

"This is a pointer that's worth a million to a man that's got good pluck and the money to back it up," said the well-dressed man with some vehemence.

"Your last tip, friend Fletcher, cost me every penny I realized from the series of well-engineered burglaries at

Tarrytown. If you can't produce something better I won't touch it with a ten-foot pole."

"That was your own fault. I told you to buy M. & N. at 60."

"I did so."

"When the stock reached 85 I 'phoned you to sell. Did you? No. You held on for a higher figure, because the market looked bearish, and you, with the other lambs who flock into the Street when the market is on the rise, believed the stock would go to par. That's where you fooled yourself. You may be as clever as they come in your line of business—I am willing to admit you are—but when you monkey with Wall Street you're out of your depth. Had you been guided by me you would have made a wad. You thought you knew it all, and you got left."

Suarez listened patiently to this call-down.

Whether or not he was conscious that he deserved it he made no sign.

His face was as expressionless as that of a wooden Indian.

"What is this pointer you are speaking of?" he asked, regarding Fletcher intently through his half-closed eyelids, a habit of his which put all who knew him well on their guard.

"How am I to be compensated for it?" asked his companion, cautiously.

"How can I tell till I know what it is?" inquired the wary Spaniard.

"And when I've told you it will be as much yours as mine."

Suarez's eyes twinkled and snapped at this diamond cut diamond play, and let out a few more perfect rings of blue smoke, which he watched float away.

"What's the use of coming away out here to see me at this hour of the night if you're not disposed to trust me?" he said, his lips curling into one of his curious smiles.

"I came here because I've got the goods and can deliver them, and you are the only man I care to apply to who has got the money to push a good thing along."

"How can you know if I have funds enough to meet your proposition?"

"You ought to have, with the plant you have upstairs for turning out gilt-edge securities, and the success you have met with in your professional operations."

"Since you know so much about my affairs, Fletcher," replied Suarez, grimly, "I wonder you don't call on the superintendent of police. If I am not mistaken, there are several tempting rewards standing for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the persons who looted neighbors of Mr. Rockefeller at Tarrytown; also for the parties who broke into several brownstone fronts in the silk-stocking district of Manhattan."

"I am not an informer," answered Fletcher.

"No; it is not a paying business where I am concerned," said Suarez, pointedly. "However, let us return to the subject. You say you have a good thing?"

"Yes, a chance that only comes once in a lifetime, and I want to make the most I can out of it."

"Well, you can't make a cent out of it unless you trust some one, can you?"

"No, I can't, curse the luck! I haven't the money to put up."

"Very good. Then if you don't think I'll do the right thing, go to some one else," said Suarez, coolly, rolling a fresh cigarette.

"But I do, and I'm going to tell you, but you must know beforehand that I want an even half of the profits."

"You're quite modest in your demands, Fletcher, considering you want me to advance the entire amount to swing your deal."

Manuel Suarez uttered a little sarcastic laugh, which seemed to irritate his companion.

"Why, man, I'm putting you in the way of making a fortune in one transaction, and I mean to make mine at the same time."

Suarez twirled his dainty moustache and considered.

"What is it, anyway?"

"Will you go halves?"

"I suppose so. But mind you, Fletcher, if your information isn't a dead sure thing I won't go into it."

"I'm not afraid of your backing me when I've told you about it. Are you prepared to go in heavy?"

"What do you call heavy?"

"You must sell 30,000 shares short."

"Of what?"

"Reading Coal & Iron Co."

Suarez dropped his cigarette, turned squarely around and faced his companion.

It was easy to see he had suddenly become intensely interested.

He was a gambler at heart, but he liked best to play with loaded dice.

"Why?" he asked, his black eyes all of a glitter.

"Because," began Fletcher, impressively, "the company will default on January interest of first mortgage bonds."

"How do you know it will?" almost hissed the Spaniard.

"I know it from the books of the company. Am not I the secretary?"

At those words Lee, who had been greedily drinking in every word of the conversation from his place of concealment, nearly dropped.

Was this, indeed, Morris Fletcher, the secretary of the Reading Coal & Iron Co.?

"Gee!" he muttered, "who is honest in this world, anyway? We read in the paper that the presidents of the big insurance companies are grafters in their respectable way; that some of the princes of finance are grafters in their peculiar way; that thousands of trusts and coal barons are working the public for all they are worth. Oh, lor, who is to be trusted?"

Then he listened to Suarez, who was speaking.

"If your statement proves true the stock will tumble."

"At least 20 per cent. It will break to less than 30 before January 1."

"You think so?"

"I know it. Matthews, the president, has sucked it dry. I happen to know that he is enormously short, and his only interest now is to force it down. Mark my words, Suarez, he will have a receiver appointed in less than ten days."

The Spaniard's eyes snapped.

"The stock declined on the market to-day because short sales had been traced to Matthews. When the real state of the case becomes known the bottom will drop out at once."

"Can I thoroughly rely on your information, Fletcher?"

"You can."

"Very well. I will go into it. But, remember, if things do not turn out as you assert," said the Spaniard, fiercely, "I advise you to take the first steamer for Europe, for if I should lay my hands upon you——"

"I'm not afraid," replied Fletcher, in a tone of confidence, which reassured Suarez. "I am willing to risk my life on this tip I have given you."

"I'll take you at your word. But, remember, it is your life against——"

"A pointer worth a million."

CHAPTER IX.

ON THE SCENT.

Morris Fletcher pushed back his chair, took a cigar from his pocket and lit it.

"It will take all of \$150,000 to swing the deal," he said. "Can you raise that much right away?"

"I can get it," replied Suarez. "I have that Bond residence job, which you suggested, on the tapis this morning. I calculate that my share of the swag will make up the amount you name."

"Then you already have over \$100,000 you can lay your hands on?" said Fletcher, with a look of satisfaction.

"I have—in money and gems. I have managed to get rid of most of the stuff we lifted in Tarrytown."

"The papers reported that a quarter of a million in jewels and solid silverware was taken from the five residences in that neighborhood," remarked the secretary of the Reading Coal & Iron Co.

"The papers always exaggerate. However, we made a very respectable haul. I should think we have cleaned up something like half a million altogether in money and other property since we began business, eight months ago."

"And our New York detectives—the finest in the world—haven't got a line on you yet, eh?"

"Not the faintest clew that I am aware of," replied Suarez, complacently.

"You're a wonder, Suarez—upon my word you are," said Fletcher, regarding this king of crooks admiringly.

"Thank you for the compliment. Have another drink before you go," he added, pointing to the sideboard, which glittered with cut-glass decanters and glasses.

"I don't mind if I do," and the secretary rose and helped

himself to a glass of a fine Tokay wine. "No one sizing up this old rookery from the outside would dream there were such expensive appointments within its four walls," and Fletcher glanced around the elegantly furnished room, with its magnificent portiere concealing the entrance to the Spaniard's sleeping quarters. "You didn't pay for all of this finery, did you?"

"Hardly. Most of it came from a Seventy-second Street residence we dismantled this summer. The owner is still in Europe with his family, and as there isn't even a visiting caretaker, the loss hasn't yet been discovered."

"You are mysterious for fair. How many people have you in with you?"

"Only three, and they are experts."

"I suppose you have no fear that one of your associates will ever go back on you, eh, Suarez?"

"Not the slightest," replied the Spaniard, showing his teeth in an unpleasant way, while his eyes hardened.

"What guarantee have you of their fidelity? The large profits you have so far managed to secure?"

"They know me, and that's enough. It wouldn't pay any one of them to play traitor. He could not escape the penalty."

"And that is——"

"Death—swift and sure. I would reach him were he guarded by the whole detective force of the city."

"How could you in case you were taken yourself?"

"That is my secret, Morris Fletcher. The penalty would reach you as well if you ever were so indiscreet as to expose the knowledge you possess of my affairs."

"Don't be afraid," said the secretary, with a nervous laugh. "I'm not a fool."

"I should hope not," replied the Spaniard, touching an electric button in the wall.

In a few minutes Mattocks appeared.

"Show this gentleman out, said Suarez. "After that I want to see you."

The Spaniard lighted a cigarette and walked up and down the apartment until his associate reappeared.

"Did you look in at the boy?" asked Suarez.

"Yes, Cap'n."

"Well?"

"I found the lamp had been put out and the room dark. He must have turned in on the bed."

"We will fit up a coop in the cellar for him by and by. Now, Mattocks, call Spivins and get your bag of tools. We've got that Boston Road job to put through before daylight. It's two o'clock now, so it's time we made a start. I'll be ready in ten minutes."

Mattocks retired and the Spaniard began to make a hasty change in his appearance.

He donned a suit of old clothes, which he took from a closet, put a black mask into an inner pocket, a revolver into his hip-pocket, and then adjusted a heavy black beard; a common, low-crowned, soft, workingman's hat completing his disguise.

Lee, watching him as he turned down the elegant swinging brass lamp in the middle of the room, preparatory to

leaving, admitted to himself that he never would have known him in his new make-up.

Suarez was an expert in concealing his identity.

"Well," mused the boy, when the Spaniard had left the apartment, "I think I have been through a good deal since I was brought to this house. It's lucky for me that I escaped from that room. Suarez is a pretty fierce proposition to be up against. So he and a couple of his pals are going to rob a house on Boston Road this morning? Their absence will give me a fine chance to get away. If I only knew what house they are going to operate on I might be able to put the Bronx police on to them and get them pinched in the act. Then I could furnish the information that would cause this house to be pulled and the dangerous gang effectually broken up. That would be doing the community a real benefit, and, at the same time, afford me a heap of satisfaction for the rough treatment I've received at this Spaniard's hands. Besides, I ought to come in for some of those rewards. As for Mr. Morris Fletcher, I'm thinking he'll find himself in a rather tight box when I've told all I know about him. There'll be an immediate vacancy in the secretaryship of the Reading Coal & Iron Co., and I don't think he'll realize anything out of this 'short' deal he's cooked up with Suarez, nor will the Spaniard, either, if I can put a spoke in his wheel."

While these thoughts and resolutions were flashing through Lee's brain, he stood partly concealed by the half-open panel which hid the secret passage.

He was cautious about leaving his secure retreat until he could make sure that the way was clear before him.

It would be a serious matter for him if the Spaniard happened to return unexpectedly and found him in that room.

While he was making up his mind on the subject he heard the front door downstairs shut with a bang that awoke the echoes of the old mansion from basement to roof.

"I believe Suarez is off at last," he said.

Springing out through the panel, which closed of its own accord, Lee ran to one of the windows overlooking the decayed lawn.

Sure enough, the Spaniard and his two pals, one of them carrying a heavy bag, were walking briskly down the gravel walk.

"If I could only get out in time to shadow them to that house in Boston Road I might accomplish their capture; but I am afraid by the time I reach the street they'll be out of sight. Well, I'll do the best I can under the circumstances. No doubt one of the gang has been left behind to keep an eye over the house, and let them in when they return, if they are so fortunate enough as to get back."

With his shoes in one hand and the dark lantern in the other, just as he came out of the hidden passage, Lee passed out into the wide, uncarpeted corridor and down the bare staircase to the hall door.

He saw that the heavy chain was in its place again across the door, which confirmed his belief that one of the gang was in the mansion.

The key of the front door was in the lock.

Putting down the lantern Lee cautiously let down the chain, unlocked the door and stepped out on the porch.

Carefully closing the door he put on his shoes.

Then avoiding the gravel path he ran down to the gate and glanced up the lonesome street.

Suarez and his pals were just vanishing in the gloom ahead.

"Maybe I can catch up with them before they turn down one of the cross streets. I must be careful how I manage it. If I could only run across a policeman it would greatly simplify matters."

It usually happens that when an officer is most wanted he fails to turn up.

We do not say this is the fault of the finest force in the world.

It is simply hard luck.

At any rate, whether this is the rule or not, it is true that no policeman hove in view while Lee was shadowing Manuel Suarez and his two companions to Boston Road that eventful morning.

The hour of three was sounding from the bell of a distant institution when the boy saw the three rascals stealthily approach a handsome detached residence fronted by a well-kept lawn.

A low iron fence separated the grounds from the sidewalk.

After a careful survey of the neighborhood, during which Lee crouched down close to a wall on the opposite side of the road, Suarez and his pals vaulted the iron barrier, one by one, crossed the lawn and disappeared around the house.

CHAPTER X.

CAUGHT.

"Now what will I do?" breathed Lee. "I haven't the least idea where I could find the nearest police station, and the possibility of meeting with a policeman if I started to look one up is rather doubtful. If I arouse the neighbors those chaps are sure to take the alarm and escape. I have a personal interest in getting the Spaniard and his gang behind the bars of the Tombs. Now how am I to accomplish it?"

Lee realized that he was up against a hard proposition; but he was a plucky boy—"the pluckiest of them all," as a well-known Wall Street broker remarked to a friend when Templeton, after an exciting chase and a hard scrap, downed and captured a sneak thief who had tried to get away with a package of bonds from him six months previous.

The incident was the talk of the Street at the time, and the boy had been made quite a hero of.

Lee was ready to go right in against the Suarez gang, then and there, if he saw any reasonable chance of bagging his game.

Certainly he could not hope to achieve much by himself.

His only weapon was the slung-shot he had found in the closet of the ancient mansion.

Of what avail was that against three powerful men, who doubtless were well armed themselves?

While the boy was scratching his head for a bright idea, and wondering of what use the officer on this post was if he was not to be found when his presence was so desirable at that moment, he heard the faint sound of rapid footsteps approaching from the direction of Third Avenue.

"By George! Here is somebody, at any rate. It isn't a cop, that's clear enough. No matter who it is, he appears in good time. Maybe he'll be able to tell me where the precinct station is, and, if not too far away, I'll make a break for it."

Nearer and nearer came the footsteps, echoing upon the still morning air.

At length an advancing shadow detached itself from the gloom on the other side of the road about half a block distant.

Lee cut across the way to meet the stranger.

The two came together a short distance from the house which was engaging the attention of the Spaniard and his companions.

The newcomer on the scene evidently looked upon Lee with suspicion, for he stopped short and put his hand in his pocket, as if he had a weapon of some kind there.

"Hold on!" cried Lee. "I want to speak to you on urgent business."

"What do you want?" asked the man, who had the appearance of a workingman of some kind dressed in his best clothes.

"One of the houses on this side of the way has just been entered by three burglars, and——"

"Which house?" asked the man, in such a startled way that the boy guessed he had some interest in the matter.

"The fifth house from here, which stands well back in its own grounds."

"The fifth? That's Mr. Bond's, and I'm his gardener."

"Then you haven't turned up any too soon if we're to catch those rascals."

"Who are you? And how do you know about this burglary business?" demanded the man, not quite sure but some trick was about to be worked on him.

"My name is Lee Templeton. I am a messenger for Rutherford P. Scott, of — Wall Street. It is no time now for me to go into the details of how I came to know these crooks had designs on the mansion which you say is Mr. Bond's. How far is the precinct station?"

"Third Avenue near 159th Street."

"That must be all of a mile from here," replied Lee, in a disappointed tone.

"It is fully that if not more," said Mr. Bond's gardener, now assured that he had nothing to fear from the boy who had so unceremoniously accosted him.

"I'm afraid it would be of no use to go that distance with the expectation of bringing back officers in time to

catch these villains. By the way, Mr. Bond and his family are in the house of course. If——"

"Mr. Bond has been away in the mining districts of Pennsylvania for the last three months, though we expect him home to-morrow. He is chief engineer of the Reading Coal & Iron Co."

"You don't say?" answered Lee, surprised at the coincidence.

He wondered for the moment if Morris Fletcher had given Suarez a tip as to the apparently unprotected condition of the chief engineer's home.

He would naturally have some knowledge of that official's movements.

"Miss Loretta, Mr. Bond's daughter, and two servants are in the house. The coachman and myself sleep above the stable."

"I'll tell you what we'll do," said Lee, energetically. "You must go to the stable and arouse the coachman. Both of you have revolvers, I suppose?"

"We have."

"I'll wait outside near the back of the house till you two join me. Then we'll go inside and tackle those chaps. I suppose there is a telephone in the house?"

"There is one in Mr. Bond's library, on the second floor."

"If you can corner those rascals and hold them off with your revolvers while I telephone to the precinct station we ought to be able to spoil their game."

"That's a good scheme," acquiesced the gardener.

"Then come along. We haven't any time to lose."

They entered by a small iron gate, to which the gardener, who said his name was John Harley, had the key.

While Harley went on to the stable, Lee cut across the lawn to the kitchen of the mansion.

He began at once to investigate the premises, and soon saw how Suarez and his associates had forced an entrance.

They had bored holes through the outside or iron storm door of the kitchen and by this means had located and lifted the bar inside.

The wooden inner door was easy for such experts to force.

Lee softly opened the two doors which the rascals had closed after them.

Then he met with a sudden and unexpected surprise.

A powerful arm reached out from the darkness of the kitchen, a hand grasped him by the collar, and he was yanked inside and then stunned by a blow in the face.

He was dragged over to one side, and bound with a short length of clothesline.

The man who had surprised him in this effectual way was Spivins, who had been left downstairs on the watch, while Suarez and Mattocks attended to the real business upstairs.

This fellow had noted the arrival of Lee and the gardener, and was on the point of giving warning to his associates, when he saw the two separate and Lee approach the kitchen door.

Spivins had no knowledge of the boy's identity, not having seen him at the old mansion, and so, naturally, presumed by his presence here that he belonged to the house.

He decided that Lee must be downed on the spot to prevent him from raising an alarm and upsetting their plans.

Then he went to the door and saw that Harley had entered the stable.

Rightly presuming that the gardener slept in the building, he hardly expected any trouble from that quarter.

He determined, however, to go upstairs and let his chief know what had occurred.

Suarez and Mattocks were at work on a safe in the library.

Leaving his assistant to continue with his drilling, the Spaniard followed Spivins down to the kitchen.

"He's only a boy," said the crook, half contemptuously.

"Where is he?" asked Suarez.

"Over in the corner, bound."

The Spaniard struck a match and flashed it in the face of the dazed lad.

A terrible curse escaped the chief crook's lips.

He recognized Lee at once, and was staggered to find the boy here of all places, when he supposed that he was safely locked up in the old mansion near Jerome Avenue.

"What is the meaning of this?" he muttered. "How in the name of thunder did he manage to make his escape? And what brought him here? It doesn't seem possible that he could have got away without help. Who could have helped him? Not Juggins (the other member of the gang who had been left behind at their headquarters)—no, he would not have dared, even if he had any interest in the boy, which he certainly has not. This chap must be smarter than I have given him credit for. He has worked his own way out in spite of my precautions. Well, he's altogether too dangerous to our interests for me to take any more chances with. There is only one safe course, and that is to put him out for good."

"Cap'n, look here!" exclaimed Spivins at this juncture, in a tense tone.

"What's the trouble?"

"Two men have come out of the stable and are coming this way. One of them has a revolver in his hand, so it's evident they either know we are in the house or something has aroused their suspicions."

CHAPTER XI.

IN THE GRASP OF THE FIRE FIEND.

The Spaniard went to the door and looked out.

"We'll let these chaps walk into a trap, Spivins," he said, with grim ferocity. "When they come in here I'll answer for the first one and you tackle the other. We must choke them into unconsciousness. Then we'll carry them down into the cellar."

This programme was carried out with great success.

Harley and the coachman, though strong men, were taken

by surprise, for they were not looking for danger in this quarter, and became easy victims.

"Now," said Suarez, after they had disposed of the two senseless employes of the house, "we'll take this boy upstairs. Lock both of those doors."

By this time Lee had recovered fully from the staggering blow Spivins had dealt out to him.

But he felt pretty blue over the situation.

Once more he was in the power of the Spaniard, and he didn't doubt but things would go hard with him.

Just what disposition Suarez would make of him he was unable to guess.

He thought he would be taken back to the old mansion.

The Spaniard and Spivins seized him between them and carried him up to the library where Mattocks was still at work at the safe.

He had finished the drilling and was inserting a small charge of some high explosive which would finish the job without too much noise.

"Look here, Mattocks, what do you think of this?"

He pointed to Templeton, whom he and Spivins had propped against the wall.

Mattocks took a hasty look, and then gasped in amazement:

"Why, how did he get here?"

"That's a question I've got to inquire into," said the Spaniard, in a rather ugly tone. "Spivins caught him coming into the kitchen below, and laid him out."

"I don't see how he could have escaped from that room," said Mattocks, scratching his head.

"That's what puzzles me. You told me that you looked into the room after I was there and found the lamp turned out, so you thought he had gone to sleep on the bed. The boy must have heard you coming, turned out the light and then crouched down in the dark near the door, waiting for you to open it. As soon as you did he quietly slipped out in the dark and so——"

"But I only pushed the door a little way open, just enough to poke my head in," asserted Mattocks, positively. "He couldn't have got by me, I'm willin' to swear."

"You are sure of that?" said Suarez, eyeing his associate keenly.

"Yes."

"You did not enter the room at all, not even for a moment?"

"No."

"Well, the fact remains that he did get out," said the Spaniard, harshly. "See here, boy," turning to Lee, "I guess you recognize me, don't you?"

"I do," replied Templeton. "You are Manuel Suarez."

"Yes, I am Manuel Suarez. Now, I want you to tell me how you got out of that room in the old house."

"I don't see that it makes any difference to you how I got out," Lee replied, doggedly.

"It makes considerable difference to me," answered Suarez, sharply. "I want to know how you managed it?"

"You won't find out through me."

A terrible look leaped into the Spaniard's eyes.

He was not accustomed to be balked.

"You refuse to tell me?"

"I do," said Lee, resolutely.

He knew he was up against it hard, anyway, and determined not to gratify the Spaniard's curiosity.

"Mattocks," commanded Suarez, "tear down those portieres."

He pointed to the draperies which divided the library from Mr. Bond's bedroom.

The man obeyed.

"Now you and Spivins tie the boy to one of those posts."

He referred to the pair of white and gold columns which stood on either side of the arch Mattocks had just denuded of its drapery.

The two rascals carried out his instructions to the letter. "What are you goin' to do with him, Cap'n?" asked Mattocks. "We can't let him go—he knows too much."

"He'll know less when I get through with him," said the Spaniard in such a significant tone that Lee shivered in spite of himself.

"Does he intend to murder me?" thought the lad, uneasily.

"Now attend to the safe," said Suarez to his lieutenant, paying no further attention to Lee.

Mattocks inserted a fuse into one of the holes he had drilled around the lock and lighted it.

The three stepped back and waited.

In half a minute there was a dull report, a slight shock, followed by a puff of whitish smoke and the door of the small safe hung open, a wreck.

Suarez then picked up a suit-case which he had previously found in a closet and had already partly loaded with valuable trinkets he had brought to light in the front room, and began shoveling into it the contents of the safe, which consisted chiefly of securities, valuable gems that had belonged to the deceased Mrs. Bond and now were the property of Miss Loretta, who was peacefully sleeping in the front room on the next floor above, and the remainder of a roll of bills Mr. Bond had left with his daughter to pay the running expenses of the house during his absence.

There was also a quantity of solid silverware in the safe, stamped with the Bond monogram.

Mattocks shoved this into a sack brought from the old house for the purpose.

Spivins filled another sack with expensive bronze and silver ornaments displayed around the two rooms.

Altogether, they were making a good haul.

Finally they were ready to leave, and then Suarez turned his attention to Lee once more.

"Take your bull's-eye, Spivins, and go down in the kitchen. You'll find a can of oil on the shelf over the sink. Fetch it here."

Spivins departed on his errand.

"Pull down those lace curtains, Mattocks," said the Spaniard, sharply.

His lieutenant stripped the two windows in a twinkling.

"Pile them around the boy's legs."

While he was doing it, Spivins appeared with the can of oil which Suarez's sharp eyes had noticed when they entered the house.

The Spaniard took it out of his hand and, approaching Lee, deliberately sprinkled a quantity of the inflammable fluid over the curtains.

"Now, pile on those portieres," he said, his eyes gleaming with a cruel ferocity which, together with the dreadful preparations, whose object could not now be misunderstood, set Templeton's nerves all of a tingle.

As soon as the portieres were thrown on top of the lace curtains Suarez scattered the remainder of the oil on the drapery.

Dropping the can and picking up the suit-case he paused before Lee.

"Now, young man," he said, malevolently, "you will either answer the question I asked you a while ago or take a roasting. Which shall it be?"

Evidently he meant every word he uttered.

"I'll explain," replied the boy, after a pause, concluding that prudence in this instance was the better part of valor.

"Do so."

"There is a picture in the room where I was confined, which——"

"A picture!" interrupted the Spaniard.

"A picture of a severed head."

"Yes, I know. What has that to do with the matter?"

"Everything."

"What do you mean?" ejaculated Suarez, in a tone of some surprise.

"The picture is painted on a panel without a frame."

"Well?"

"The panel covers a secret recess in the wall."

"What!"

"It works on hinges and is operated by a concealed spring."

"Are you telling the truth?"

"Absolutely."

"Go on."

"I discovered the spring accidentally, the panel opened out and I sprang into the recess, which I found communicated with a passage between the walls of the house. I investigated further and found another panel which let me out into another room. Then I had no trouble in walking down to the front door and letting myself out."

"That is the whole story?" asked the Spaniard.

"That is exactly how I escaped."

Suarez eyed the boy keenly while he considered his explanation.

That there were panels and a secret passage in the old mansion was news to him.

At the same time it was welcome news, for his fertile brain perceived how such things could be utilized to advantage in case the house was raided.

"I accept your statement," he said, with a smile which

boded no good to the boy. "Now tell me, why didn't you go home at once after securing your freedom?"

"I had my reasons."

"And they were connected with this house?"

"They were."

"How came you to know we intended to work this place?"

"I heard you state the fact to your visitor, Morris Fletcher."

"You did, eh?" exclaimed Suarez, in some surprise. "You overheard our conversation? Where were you?"

"Behind the panel which opens into that room."

"Did you follow us to Boston Road?"

"I did."

"You entered the grounds with a man. Who was he?"

"Mr. Bond's gardener."

"And you two hatched up a scheme to catch us, eh?" with a grim smile.

Lee did not reply.

"You were a fool to think such a thing possible. This gardener and another man, whom you also counted on, are safely stowed away in the cellar. They were easy, like yourself."

"What do you intend to do with me?" asked Lee.

"What should I do with a slippery lad like yourself, who knows too much for his own and our good?"

The Spaniard's eyes glittered.

"You don't mean to kill me," said Templeton, in a hushed voice.

"That's just what I mean to do," replied Suarez, coolly. "As long as you live you are a menace to us. The stakes we are playing for are high, therefore it were folly for us to give you the slightest chance to queer us. You missed your one opportunity this morning. You should have gone to the police instead of taking the game into your own hands. Still, I should have got you in the long run, unless my lucky star failed me."

Lee made an effort to speak, but his tongue failed him. He was overcome by the horror of his position.

"Mattocks, and you, Spivins, put a match to this stuff, do you hear?" ordered Suarez.

They heard and obeyed him without the slightest hesitation.

In a few seconds tiny shoots of flame began to spread themselves over the crumpled mass of material.

Suarez raised his arm with a menacing gesture.

"This time, young man, I think I've got you dead to rights," said the Spaniard, with a look of satisfied malice. "In less than five minutes those oil-soaked portieres will be a mass of flame. Where then will you be?"

"You are a villain, Manuel Suarez, and will pay dearly for this crime," cried the lad, hoarsely.

"Talk is cheap, young fellow. He laughs best who laughs last. I fancy I am laughing last."

He turned to his pals.

"Come," he said, peremptorily. "Grab your bags and let us be off. We have no further use for this place."

Mattocks and Spivins shouldered their burdens, while

Suarez himself carried the suit-case, and in this order they left the room, the Spaniard pausing just a moment to cast one last look at his victim toward whose lower limbs the fire was beginning to spread with increasing intensity.

CHAPTER XII.

LORETTA BOND.

"Heaven, must I die thus?" cried Lee, straining fiercely at his cords.

It seemed as if he was doomed to a lingering torture, for his bonds held him firmly to the pillar in spite of the muscular effort he brought to bear on them.

The oil-soaked draperies gave off a considerable amount of pungent smoke, and this floated toward the open door of the library and gradually ascended to the upper stories.

It penetrated to the room occupied by Loretta Bond, whose slumber had not been disturbed by the guarded movements of the burglars while they were in the house.

The strong odor of the burning astral oil awakened the sleeping girl.

She sat up in bed with a start.

"There is something burning!" she cried, in alarm, leaping from the bed.

She opened the door on the hall, and the whiff of smoke which puffed into her face completed her consternation.

"Oh, heaven!" she exclaimed, almost overcome for the moment by the thought. "The house is surely on fire."

She rushed to the balusters and looked down.

The gas which Suarez and his associates had left burning, shone through the library door.

"It is the library! Oh, if I can only reach the telephone!" she exclaimed.

She ran swiftly down the stairs, and as her white figure was framed in the doorway, Lee caught sight of her.

"Help me, for heaven's sake!" he cried out to the startled girl.

She saw the lad bound to the white pillar, the portieres gone from their accustomed place, and the creeping flames eating their way through a pile of material gathered around his feet.

The picture thus unexpectedly presented to her was so strange and terrifying that she remained rooted to the spot, as though she had suddenly been turned by some enchantment into a graven image.

"Save me! I am bound here and cannot move an inch!" cried Lee, desperately.

His frenzied appeal broke the spell which held her in the doorway.

She was a brave girl, and the sight of a human being in peril nerved her to action.

She rushed into the room, saw the fire was confined to that one place, and, with admirable presence of mind, ran to her father's bed, tore off the spread and flung it over the blazing heap of draperies.

It smothered the fire at once, but not satisfied with that one effort she got a blanket and threw it upon the spread.

Then she placed a heavy chair on top of all, and the danger was over.

"You are a brave girl," said Lee, who had watched her well-directed movements with admiration, as she paused panting in front of him. "You have saved my life."

"Who are you, and why are you here and in such a terrible position? What has happened in this house?" Then, as her eyes wandered around the two rooms, she turned white. "Merciful heaven! We have been robbed!"

"If you will cut me loose I'll tell you all about it. You will find a knife in my pocket—the right one."

Loretta drew out the pocket-knife and, with its sharp blade, set Lee free.

"Thank you, miss," he said, gratefully, as he returned the knife to his pocket. "You reached me in the nick of time. You had better return to your room and dress yourself, or you will catch cold. While you are doing that I will go down to the cellar and release your coachman and gardener, who, like myself, were surprised by the burglars. But, first of all, I will notify the police by telephone."

When Loretta recollected that she was clad only in her nightgown, she blushed vividly and flew for the stairs.

"You will not go away," she cried, pausing a moment on the first step.

"No," replied Lee. "Not till I have seen you again and explained the situation."

He called up the telephone branch office and asked to be connected with the precinct station.

To the sergeant in charge he told what had occurred, described Suarez and his two companions, said they had left the house laden with their booty only about fifteen minutes before, and indicated the direction they had undoubtedly taken, not forgetting a description of the old mansion near Jerome Avenue, the exact location of which he could not state.

"It is now up to the police to do something," said the boy to himself. "If they rush a posse by patrol-wagon to the neighborhood of the ancient mansion they ought to be able to cut those villains off and recover Mr. Bond's property."

Then Lee descended to the kitchen, found and lighted a lamp, and went into the cellar.

The coachman and the gardener, now conscious, were trussed together like a pair of fowl on the way to market.

Templeton quickly cut them loose.

"My heavens!" cried Harley. "Where have you been all this time?"

"In a worse scrape than yourselves. Come up to the second floor and I will show you what I have been up against."

The three walked up to the library.

The gardener and the coachman were staggered by the evidences of pillage and ruin which the two rooms presented.

Lee explained to them how the Spaniard had treated him, and said he owed his life to Miss Bond, who had, for-

fortunately, appeared at the critical moment, put out the fire and released him from a perilous situation.

He did not consider it necessary to refer to his previous adventures in connection with Suarez and his gang, at least not to the gardener and the coachman.

He told the whole story, however, without reserve to Loretta Bond later on, when they sat together alone, after the two men had removed all traces of the fire from the place.

His recital, however, was interrupted by a policeman from the station, sent by the sergeant to find out the particulars of the robbery and extent of the loss.

As soon as the officer had taken his departure, Lee finished his story.

"You have had a most remarkable, as well as terrible, experience, Mr. Templeton," said Loretta, regarding the young man with unfeigned interest. "It sounds almost like a chapter from an exciting novel. And then, just to think, I have actually had a part in it myself."

"A part I shall never forget, Miss Bond, as long as I live," said Lee, earnestly.

Miss Loretta blushed and smiled.

"I expect my father back to-day," she said. "He has been away three months on business for his company."

"The Reading Coal and Iron Company, you mean?"

"Yes. How did you know he was connected with that company?" she asked, somewhat surprised.

"Your gardener told me that Mr. Bond was the company's chief engineer."

"That's right. As I was saying, I expect him home to-day, which is fortunate under these distressing circumstances. I have not the slightest idea what our loss is, but papa will know, of course, at once. All our silverware and, what is worse, poor dead mamma's jewels, which papa gave me, have been taken. There were also many valuable securities in the safe. Then our most costly ornaments, which were kept in these rooms, are gone. Altogether, we have lost a great deal. I hope the police will be able to capture the robbers and restore to us our property, much of which could not be replaced."

"I sincerely hope they may be arrested, for I myself shall not feel safe until Manuel Suarez has been put behind the bars," said Lee.

"What an awful wicked man he must be!" she cried.

"He certainly is a thoroughly bad man."

Loretta accompanied Lee to the door.

"Father will wish to see and talk to you about this trouble," she said. "Will it be possible for you, as a special favor, to call on us this evening?"

"I will make it a point to do so."

"Thank you. I am ever so much obliged."

"Miss Bond, please don't put it that way. It is I who am under the deepest obligations to you. I consider it my duty to oblige you in every way possible."

"You are very kind to say so," she said, with a slight blush.

Then they shook hands like old friends, and Lee took his leave.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE LOST PACKAGE.

It was after five o'clock when Lee reached home that morning.

As he naturally expected, he found his mother and sister in a state bordering on distraction over his prolonged and unexplained absence.

They supposed, of course, that he had gone to the precinct station on 125th Street, and when he did not return by eleven May took the car over to see what detained him.

She was surprised and worried to find out that he had not been there, nor had he been sent for by the officer in charge.

The girl returned home, and neither she nor her mother slept a wink that night.

It was a long and exciting story Lee had to tell them about his night's adventures, though in consideration for their feelings he suppressed the most serious parts of the case.

He preferred they should not learn the real truth just yet, until the Spaniard should have been arrested, lest they be worried for his future safety.

However, they looked upon the matter as sufficiently serious to entreat him to be very careful whom he trusted hereafter.

"You can bet your last nickel I won't take any more chances after this," he assured them. "I've had experience enough to last me a lifetime."

"I should hope that you had," replied Mrs. Templeton, with a shudder.

"What a wonderful old house that must be to have secret panels and hidden passages, just like what I have read about in the old houses and mediæval castles of Europe," said May, with a look of intense interest. "Why, Lee, if I had seen that painting of the severed head you described, under the same circumstances, I should have fainted dead away," she added, with a little shiver.

"I have no doubt but you would," replied her brother. "And that reminds me of the package I found all covered with dust in that closet behind the picture."

"A package!" she cried. "Do let me see it."

"Sure," and Lee inserted his hand in the inside pocket of his jacket, where he remembered having put it. "Why, it can't be that I have lost it?" he added, when he discovered the pocket to be empty.

"Lost it!" exclaimed May. "How provoking!"

He tried his other pockets, but there was no sign of the brown paper package.

"Well, that's too bad. Where could it have got to?" much disappointed. "Do you know, sis, I had an idea there was something valuable in it, on account of the careful way it was done up, and the place I found it in."

"Isn't that mean?" said May, for her curiosity had been excited.

"Well, it is mean, for a fact. Maybe it dropped out at

Mr. Bond's. I took my coat off there, to see if it had been scorched."

"Scorched! Why, what do you mean?" asked May, in surprise, for Lee had been careful not to mention the fire incident.

"Oh, nothing," replied Lee, quickly and with apparent carelessness.

"What sort of package was it? How big?"

"About so big," and her brother indicated its size and shape.

"How thick?"

"I should say an inch."

"It might have been money," cried May. "You careless boy, to go and lose it."

"I hardly think it could have been money; yet that is about the size of a package of bills."

"Of course it is."

"Well, what's the use of crying over spilled milk? It's gone."

"If I had found and then lost such a package I should have been just ready to cry, for I should feel certain it was valuable."

"That's the way with you girls. Now, I think I'll turn in for an hour. You must wake me up in time for a bite and my usual train."

Lee felt rather rocky when he started downtown to business that morning.

He wasn't used to being deprived of a night's rest.

He missed his regular train by ten minutes, and Sam Hawkins didn't wait for him.

Having no one to talk to, he fell asleep before he reached 110th Street and did not wake till the guard, who knew him and his destination, yelled "Hanover Square!" in his ear.

The walk from the station to the office brightened him up a bit, so that when he went to his desk he began to feel something like his old self again.

As soon as Mr. Scott arrived, however, Lee went in to see him.

"Can I have your attention a little while, sir?" he asked his employer. "The matter is important and relates to Manuel Suarez."

"Certainly," said the broker, swinging around in his chair and facing him.

Lee then acquainted him with everything that had occurred to him on the preceding night, including the events of the morning.

Mr. Scott was, naturally, very much astonished.

The boy had hardly finished his story, which he had made as brief as possible, when Mr. Johnson, the detective, was announced.

Of course Lee had to go all over his experiences again for the information of the sleuth.

Johnson was much impressed by his narrative.

"You seem to have had a tough time of it, my lad. This Spaniard is an out-and-out scoundrel, and a particularly dangerous one. Where is that old mansion situated?"

"It is on a side street off Jerome Avenue, about two miles

above Central Bridge. That is about as close as I can come to it, for I was taken there in the dark in a carriage. The neighborhood is very thinly built up. It is a large, old-fashioned dwelling, standing back about one hundred feet from the street line, and doesn't look as if it were occupied."

"It can be found easily enough," said the detective, confidently. "Suarez may have rented it; or the property may be involved in some interminable lawsuit, and the Spaniard, getting wind of the fact, took possession of it on the quiet, as its lonesome situation would just suit his purposes. As you say you put the Bronx police on the track of both the rascals and the mansion, it is probable they have taken charge of the place, even if they have failed to catch the crooks. Suarez is a mighty clever villain, and it is evident that this bond matter of yours," to Mr. Scott, "is but a drop in the bucket of his operations. This must be the very gang the Secret Service people are after."

"I think I had better telephone to the Bronx station that has the matter in hand and find out what developments, if any, have occurred."

"I wish you would," said the detective; "it will save me the trouble of doing so."

Mr. Scott pulled his desk 'phone towards him and opened up communication with the police station in question.

The following particulars were learned: That Suarez and his two pals had been overtaken that morning not far from the old house and put up a fight, when two of the officers were wounded; one of the crooks, recognized as Spivins, an old hand, captured and the property stolen from the Bond residence recovered; the Spaniard and Mattocks eluded the police and escaped; the old house was subsequently taken possession of by the authorities.

"I think I see the finish of this gang, but that will not be until Manuel Suarez has been put behind the bars. You need have no fear now, Mr. Scott, that the receipt for those \$17,550 worth of Reading Railroad bonds will ever turn up. Suarez made an unlucky move when he brought those bonds here for sale and then monkeyed with this messenger of yours. I've seen some plucky lads in my time, but I feel no hesitation in saying this boy is the pluckiest of them all. At any rate, he's the Spaniard's hoodoo."

CHAPTER XIV.

MAY TEMPLETON HAS FUN AT HER BROTHER'S EXPENSE.

The interest Lee felt in the capture of Manuel Suarez drove all thoughts of Morris Fletcher and his operations from his head for the time being.

As soon as possible he bought a copy of an early edition of an afternoon paper and found the burglary at Mr. Bond's house duly reported, together with the information that Mr. Scott had received over the wire, dressed up in the usual reportorial style.

Lee was disappointed not to find any later developments.

Sam came into the office about one o'clock, looking for him to go to lunch, and they went around to Broad Street together.

"You look as if you'd been up all night," remarked Sam, inquisitively. "Had a toothache?"

"No," replied Lee.

"Somebody sick in the family?"

Templeton shook his head.

"Been to the lodge?" grinned Sam.

"What lodge would I go to?"

"Oh, any old thing. A wedding, birthday party, smoker, or such. Whatever it was, you're uncommonly close about it," grumbled his fat chum.

"Don't get mad, Sam," replied Lee, soothingly. "You don't know but I was studying the stock reports for the week."

"Oh, come, now, you can't put that down my throat," said the fat boy, knowingly. "I guess you don't want to let on where you were last night. Isn't that about the size of it?"

"Well, to be honest with you, that is the size of it. I have reasons for keeping my movements last night a secret even from you, Sam; but you shall know all about it in due time."

"Must be something mighty important for you to make so much mystery out of it," said Sam, curiously.

"You shall judge of that yourself, after a while."

"All right; let it go at that," replied the fat boy, as they walked into their customary quick-lunch house.

That afternoon Lee noticed an item in a financial journal to the effect that the output of the Reading Coal and Iron Company had been greatly below its usual average for the current year. The article also stated that the company was prospecting a new property which it had acquired in the spring, and hopes were entertained that coal could be found on it. The company's stock had depreciated from 80 to 50 within a year and a half, and that unless there was a change for the better in its prospects a still further decline in its securities might be looked for.

"The last time I looked at the indicator it was quoted at 47," he mused, after reading the above.

In another part of the same paper he saw the announcement that the annual meeting of the board of directors would take place on Friday afternoon of that week.

That put him in mind of Morris Fletcher and what he had said about the practical bankruptcy of the company.

"I guess your name will be mud, Mr. Fletcher, after I tell Mr. Bond to-night about the game you are up to and the elegant company you keep. As to your pointer, I guess it's worth a million, all right, to any man with the cash to back it. I'll bet there are hundreds of men in the Street who would give a fat wad to know what I do about the Reading Coal and Iron Company. It's no use to me, as I haven't any money to invest on the strength of it, and I doubt if I could make anything out of it by trying to dispose of the information, for I have no means of proving it. The only thing for me to do is to go over the matter with Mr. Bond. I may be doing him a good turn by mak-

ing him wise to the subject, in which case he'll no doubt take a friendly interest in me, and that would just suit me, for Miss Loretta is a very pretty girl and exactly my style."

After supper Lee dressed himself in his best clothes and announced his intention of visiting the Bonds.

There was a provoking little smile on his sister's face, as she remarked, sweetly:

"I suppose Miss Loretta Bond is the magnet which attracts you to the Bronx. Is she pretty?"

"Oh, come, now, sis, you want to know too much all at once," answered Lee, with a blush.

"Why, what are you blushing for?" she asked, with dancing eyes.

"I'm not blushing," protested the boy, with an added flush.

"Aren't you? Mother, look at Lee's face."

Mrs. Templeton glanced at her manly-looking boy and smiled.

"Don't worry about my face," said the lad. "I feel warm, that's all."

"Oh, aren't we got up regardless to-night! I never saw you put on so many frills before, when you went out calling. Why, I can smell the white rose perfume on your handkerchief from here."

"That's the way with sisters," grinned Lee. "Always butting in. You don't hear me saying anything when you spend an hour or two over your twilight on those occasions when Harry Spencer is expected to call here."

"Oh, aren't you horrid!" cried May, blushing like a June rose. "The idea! An hour or two at my toilet! It's no such thing. I have to make myself presentable."

"I notice you don't take all that trouble when Sam Hawkins drops in. Any old thing seems good enough then."

"Why, he doesn't come to see me, you good-for-nothing boy! He's your particular company."

"What of it? He thinks you're the whole thing, all right."

"Why, the idea!" and she laughed heartily. "Does he really?"

"That's what he does. Told me so many times. You don't know what you're missing in Sam."

"Oh, I like Sam well enough," she said, with a smile. "But isn't he just dreadfully fat?"

"Yes, he is a trifle stout," Lee admitted, with a chuckle.

"A trifle stout. Ha, ha, ha! Why, he can hardly get in at that door."

"Nonsense! There are a lot of girls who would give everything they possess, except their clothes, of course, to have Sam for a beau."

"Dear me; I ought to feel highly honored at his preference," she giggled.

"I should say you ought. Why, Harry Spencer isn't in his class. He's a dude."

"Mother, did you hear that?" cried May.

"You mustn't tease your sister, Lee," interposed their mother, reprovingly.

"Who's teasing her? I am only trying to make her see——"

"Now, Lee, that's enough on the subject, please," said May.

"All right. If you won't listen to reason, I'm off," and he grabbed his hat.

"Lee," spoke up the little mother, "be home early. You didn't sleep a wink last night, you know, and I shall feel nervous if you are out late again."

"All right, mother. I won't stay late. So long, sis."

CHAPTER XV.

LEE CALLS ON LORETTA BOND AND HER FATHER.

It was a little after eight when Lee rang the bell at the Bond residence on Boston Road.

A maid opened the door, and Lee asked for Miss Loretta Bond.

"Who shall I say?" asked the girl, as he stepped into the hall.

"Lee Templeton."

The maid showed him into the parlor and lit the gas. Then she went upstairs.

In a moment or two Loretta, looking just too lovely for anything, so thought Lee, tripped down from above and entered the parlor.

It was clear she had been expecting Lee.

"It is very kind of you to call," she said, allowing her hand to rest in his for a moment.

"Not at all," he replied, smiling. "You asked me to come, you know, and I wouldn't have disappointed you for the world."

She blushed and smiled.

"Come up to the library. Papa is there, and, of course, he wants to make your acquaintance. I suppose you have seen in the paper that we have recovered all of our property, and that one of the thieves was arrested?"

"Yes. I have received notice to appear at the Tombs Police Court to-morrow morning."

"I am pleased to know you, Mr. Templeton," said Mr. Bond, when Loretta presented Lee to her father.

The chief engineer of the Reading Coal and Iron Company was a fine-looking gentleman of perhaps fifty years.

"I wish to thank you for the plucky effort which you made this morning to save my property. I am satisfied it was through no fault of yours that you did not succeed. I deeply regret what you suffered at the hands of those rascals in this room, and am thankful my daughter proved herself equal to the emergency."

"I owe my life to her, Mr. Bond. In my opinion, she is one girl in a thousand, and you must feel very proud of her. But for her the house might even have been destroyed."

Mr. Bond looked pleased as Lee praised his only child, whom he almost idolized, while Loretta blushed like a June rose.

"According to the story you told my daughter, and which she has repeated to me, you have had a very thrilling chapter of experiences with those scoundrels. If you have no

objection, I should like to listen to it again from your own lips."

Lee was quite willing to oblige him, and began with the Spaniard's visit to Mr. Scott's office.

Both the chief engineer and his daughter were horrified with the lad's description of what he went through at No. 1 Broadway.

Templeton then went on to state how he had been kidnapped from his home and carried to the old mansion in the Bronx.

When he told about the weird-looking painting of the severed head, which he had skipped in his narrative to Loretta, the young miss shuddered.

"That room must be awfully spooky," she said.

"The picture is, at any rate," replied Lee. "However, if it had not aroused in me such peculiar sensations I should not have bothered with it, and so would not have discovered the secret cupboard and the passage beyond, nor have known of the Spaniard's intention to rob this house, as well as other matters I regard as important, nor should I have been able to leave the mansion as I did."

Then Lee spoke about the package he found in the cupboard and afterward missed when he reached home.

"A brown paper packet, well wrapped up?" asked Loretta, quickly.

"Yes; that is it," he said, eagerly. "Did you find it? I wondered if I could have dropped it in this room."

"Yes, I found it under the end of that lounge. I thought it might have been left by one of those burglars. I will get it."

It was lying on top of the open safe, and she ran over and brought it to him.

"Thank you," he said, slipping it into his pocket again.

"I will examine it when I get home."

"It might contain something of value," she remarked.

"And findings is keepings, you know."

"I'm not so sure of that," said Lee. "The fact that I found it in that old house does not necessarily make me the owner of it."

"Not if its rightful owner should turn up and claim it," said Mr. Bond. "But if you should not be able to locate the person to whom it belongs—he might be dead and his heirs not discoverable—you will have a legal right to retain whatever the package may contain."

"I suppose that's fair enough."

"Quite so. The law of finding is that the finder has a clear title against every one but the owner. This law was declared by the King's Bench, in England, over 100 years ago in a case where a person found a wallet containing a sum of money on a shop floor. He handed the wallet and contents to the shopkeeper to be returned to the owner. After three years, during which the owner did not call for his property, the finder demanded the wallet and money from the shopkeeper. The latter refused to give them up on the ground that they were found on the premises. The former then sued the shopkeeper, and it was held that against all the world but the owner the title of the finder is perfect."

"I am very glad to know that," said Lee. "Now I will go on with my story. I have something to tell which I am sure will interest you, sir, as it directly concerns the interests of the Reading Coal & Iron Co., of which you are the chief engineer and, as I understand, a large stockholder."

"Indeed! What is it?" asked Mr. Bond, in some surprise.

"I may say right here that my story will reflect strongly upon Mr. Morris Fletcher, the company's secretary."

"In what way?"

"You will have to take my word for what I am going to repeat to you, Mr. Bond, as I have no way of proving the matter. My disclosure may seem incredible to you, sir, but I assure you on my word of honor that it is absolutely true."

"Do I understand you to mean that your statement will connect Mr. Fletcher with some unworthy transaction?"

"Yes, sir. He is on friendly terms with this very Spaniard, Manuel Suarez, who attempted to do me up in connection with the bonds and the robbery of this house."

"Impossible!" exclaimed Mr. Bond, incredulously.

"I leave you to judge for yourself, sir."

Whereupon Lee gave the chief engineer a succinct account of the interview he had overheard in the old mansion between Suarez and Fletcher.

Mr. Bond's interest in the story grew as it proceeded.

The boy's statement clearly bore the impress of truth, and greatly impressed his listener.

"Did you ever see Mr. Fletcher before?" he asked.

"No, sir."

"Then, of course, you cannot be sure the person to whom you refer actually is our Morris Fletcher."

"But he said he was secretary of the Reading Coal & Iron Company."

"Describe his personal appearance as near as you can."

Lee did so, and Mr. Bond drew a long breath.

"I am afraid you are right after all, Mr. Templeton. You have described our secretary almost to a hair. So the man is a rascal! And it appears Duncan Matthews, the president, is tarred with the same brush. Well," grimly, "he has killed the goose to get its golden eggs. He has been just a little too previous in his estimate of the future of the Reading Company. Far from being bankrupt at this moment, the company never was in better shape to bring confusion into the ranks of its traducers."

"But, Mr. Bond, if the company defaults in the January interest of its first mortgage bonds, will it not go into the hands of a receiver?"

"The company will not default. When I appear before the board of directors next Friday afternoon I shall present facts and figures which will make all the difference in the world with the future prospects of the company. What I am telling you now, Mr. Templeton, is in strict confidence. It must go no further, do you understand? It must not reach the ears of Wall Street in advance of action on the part of the board. Last spring the Reading Company pur-

chased additional property in Pennsylvania, with the hope that coal might be discovered on it."

"I saw a statement to that effect in a Wall Street journal to-day," said Lee.

"Well, that expectation has just been realized. I have been conducting the surveys and prospecting for three months past. I have found coal, and a very extensive and valuable bed of it at that. I have returned to report in person to the board. For more than a year the unstable outlook of the company has caused its securities to depreciate in value. This discovery, however, will transform them into the class known as gilt-edged. In conclusion, I will say to you, young man, here is the opportunity for you to make a little money. If you can raise any funds at all invest it in R. C. & I. Co. on a ten per cent. margin. It is now ruling at 47. Buy to-morrow. You can take my word for it that the stock will not go below 45, and on Saturday morning it will begin a boom which will carry it into the 80's, if not higher."

"I am much obliged to you for the tip, Mr. Bond," said Lee, gratefully.

"You are welcome to it. All I request of you is not to confide this pointer to any one else. Use it yourself, if you can, but it must rest there."

"You may rely on me, sir."

"I am sure I can, else I had not trusted you with the knowledge."

"Shall you want to use me as a witness against Mr. Fletcher?"

"I shall probably ask you to appear before a special meeting of a majority of the directors and tell them what you have told me. They will then decide what action to take against their unworthy secretary and president."

Lee then finished the story up to the moment he was saved by Loretta Bond.

After that he spent a very pleasant hour with the gentleman and his lovely daughter.

When he left, at a quarter to ten, he promised Loretta that he would call again at an early date.

CHAPTER XVI.

HOW HE GOT THERE.

It may seem funny, but, as a matter of fact, Lee didn't think of that brown paper package Loretta had returned to him until he was in the act of retiring for the night.

His thoughts had been engaged with the money-making possibilities of the pointer confided to him by Mr. Bond.

"If I only had \$5,000 now I could buy a thousand shares of Reading Coal & Iron Co. stock on a ten per cent. margin, and if it went up eventually to 80, as Mr. Bond says it surely will, as he is in the position to judge pretty accurately, why, I'd clear \$40,000. Think of that! Ye gods! I could buy a fine house for mother and sis to live in. Unfortunately, I haven't got \$5,000, nor the tenth

part of that sum. I have only \$250 in the bank, and mighty lucky I am to have that."

Lee had accumulated that modest amount by fortunate investments on the market at various times.

He put in much of his time studying Stock Exchange methods, with a view to the future, when he expected to be in a better position to utilize his knowledge.

And now he was suddenly put in possession of a tip worth thousands of dollars to any person with the capital to back it.

"I don't see how I can raise a dollar more than I've got," he mused, as he removed his coat and hung it up.

Then he began to figure on what he could accomplish with his \$250.

"I can buy just 50 shares. Well, that's better than nothing. I ought to realize \$1,500 on them when R. C. & I. Cq. gets up in the 80's."

It was when he was unloosening his necktie that he recollected about the package.

"Gee! I wonder where my wits are going? I'll just look into that thing now and see what it contains."

He got it from his pocket and held it under the gas-jet.

"It is done up carefully enough, goodness knows, to warrant the supposition that it holds something valuable. Well, here goes!" and he took a pair of scissors. "Stop! I will make a wish first. I'll imagine this is Aladdin's Lamp and I wish this may be worth—let me see, I'll put it low, \$5,000 at least. There now," he grinned at the package, "if you're any good at all you might at any rate do me that favor."

With considerable eagerness and curiosity Lee cut the strings, tore the paper asunder and saw—well, don't mention it!—a pile of bank bills.

"Is this a dream?" he almost shouted.

No, he had never been more wide awake in his life.

He unpinned the slip which held them together and counted them.

There were fifty of them, every one stamped \$500—in all \$25,000.

"Say, this beats everything!"

His joy was dampened by the reflection which soon came to him that this money did not really belong to him.

"I suppose I'll have to hunt up the owner, for I couldn't think of keeping another person's property. I wasn't brought up that way. However, until the owner does turn up the money belongs to the finder; that's what Mr. Bond says, and he seems to know the law pretty well. Under these circumstances am I justifiable in using this money for my own profit before a reasonable time shall have passed? I am afraid not; but as I have a sure thing on the market I think I can take the risk of stretching the point. I'll dream over it."

Lee was permitted to sleep until nearly eight o'clock next morning.

When he sat down to breakfast he was feeling like a bird.

He had decided to use the \$25,000 to make his fortune in Wall Street, and after he had realized on his deal he would look up the owner of the brown paper packet.

Sam was waiting for him at the station.

As soon as an express came along they boarded it and were soon being whirled downtown.

"That was quite a burglary up at the Bond residence in the Bronx," remarked Sam. "They've caught one of the crooks and got all of the stuff back."

Lee didn't say anything, for he was reading the fuller account of the affair in the morning paper.

His name wasn't mentioned, nor anything about what he had been through. That information had been suppressed by the Bonds, and Lee was thankful to avoid the publicity such a sensational experience would have given him.

He grinned as he listened to his chum's comments on the story.

"The papers these days seem to print little else than the doings of criminals," said Sam, as he folded up his paper and put it in his pocket. "I asked my dad last night what caused most of the crime in the world."

"What did he say?" asked Lee, with some interest.

"Drink. Now what bothers me is what causes drink?"

"That's easy," grinned Lee.

"Ho! How is it easy? What causes so many people to drink, you're so smart?" snorted Sam.

"Why, thirst," snickered Lee.

Sam wouldn't speak to him for three minutes after that.

"I say, Sam," asked Lee, at length, nudging his companion, "do you think a man ought to be chloroformed at sixty?"

"I think some boys who make funny remarks ought to be chloroformed at once," grunted Sam.

"Don't you think women ought to be chloroformed at sixty as well as men?" persisted Lee.

"I think any woman who will admit being sixty ought to be chloroformed," growled the fat boy.

"That isn't so bad for you," laughed Lee.

"Ho! You're pretty well up in financial statistics, aren't you?" grinned Sam, with a suspicious twinkle in his eye.

"What do you want to know?"

"What's the first mention of a banking transaction in the history of the world?"

"Now you've got me, Sam. I couldn't tell you."

"I know."

"You know!" said Lee, in some surprise. "Well, if you know let us hear about it. I hope it's founded on good authority."

"The best—the Bible," snickered Sam. "The first mention of a banking transaction in the history of the world is when Pharaoh received a check on the bank of the Red Sea. Ha, ha, ha! This is where I get back at you."

"Sam, you're mighty brilliant this morning," retorted Lee, without a smile. "As you seem to know so much about Pharaoh and the Red Sea, will you tell me why he and all his army were drowned in the Red Sea when they were pursuing the Israelites?"

"Sure," chuckled the fat boy. "Because they couldn't swim."

"Hanover Square!" roared the guard at this interesting point, and the two boys got out.

Lee went to the Tombs police court at ten o'clock, where Spivins waived examination, and before he returned to the office he made a call at a big bank, which he knew had a department for buying stocks, and was shown into the little office of the gentleman who attended to that branch of its business.

"I wish you to purchase for me 5,000 shares of Reading Coal & Iron Co., on the usual margin, at the market price, which is 46 just now," said Lee.

"Who is the stock for?"

"For my own account."

"What! You?" exclaimed the gentleman, surprised.

"Yes, sir," replied Lee, in a business-like way.

"I am afraid I couldn't take such a large order from a boy without knowing something about you."

"My name is Lee Templeton. I live at No. — West 128th Street. I work for Rutherford P. Scott, of No. — Wall Street, and I can refer you to Mr. George Bond, chief engineer of the Reading Coal & Iron Co., of No. — Boston Road. You can communicate with him by telephone, either at the company's offices or at his home."

The gentleman was impressed by the lad's straightforward manner.

"Wait a moment," he said, after making notes of what Lee had told him.

He went to the bank telephone and opened up communication with Mr. Bond first of all.

He reached the engineer at the offices of the company, and what that gentleman said satisfied the bank official.

"I will take the order," he said when he came back. "You are a large dealer for one so young."

Lee paid him \$23,000 in cash to secure the bank against loss, and the institution undertook to advance the difference between that and the market value of the stock—\$207,000.

Then the boy returned to the office and went about his work as usual, just as if he wasn't interested in the biggest deal a boy of his years had ever engaged in in Wall Street.

Friday afternoon, when the directors of the Reading Coal & Iron Co. met, Duncan Matthews, the president, and Morris Fletcher, the secretary, were treated to the surprise of their lives.

Subsequently both Matthews and Fletcher were compelled to resign.

Matthews himself became bankrupt through utter inability to cover his "short" interests.

Next morning the news that a great discovery of coal had been made on the new property of the Reading Company was known all over the Street, and as a consequence there was a big scramble for the stock on the Exchange that day.

When the Exchange closed at noon R. C. & I. had risen to 60.

On Monday the floor was in an uproar over the stock, and it rose in bounds of a point at a time, touching 75 before three o'clock.

And you may be sure Lee kept track of it.

At that figure he had a profit on paper of \$145,000, which was enough to turn almost any person's head wild with happiness.

But there wasn't a noticeable difference in Lee's demeanor.

He accepted his wonderful good fortune with the stoicism of the American Indian.

As a matter of fact, it had come so quick that he hadn't had time to realize the sensation of sudden riches.

Something happened that day, however, that gave him almost greater satisfaction than the money he had made.

That was the capture of Manuel Suarez and Mattocks by Mr. Johnson and a couple of the Secret Service men.

At the trial of the three crooks, which came off in due time, Lee's thrilling experiences came to light, and he became famous in Wall Street in a day.

Not only that, but the fact that he had cleared \$225,000 by selling 5,000 shares of Reading Coal & Iron Co. at 91 5-8 a few days before the conviction of the burglars earned him the title on the Street of "The Boy Who Got There."

The newspapers got hold of all this as a matter of course, and what they didn't do to Lee Templeton in the way of boosting him into temporary notoriety isn't worth mentioning.

The day Suarez and his pals were sentenced to a 20-year term at Sing Sing prison, Mr. Scott handed Lee a check for \$500 in recognition of what he had suffered in the broker's interest in the bond affair.

Lee also participated to the extent of \$5,000 in the rewards paid for the arrest and conviction of the perpetrators of the Tarrytown and other big robberies, as well as for certain forgeries of Government bonds.

To-day Lee is a most important factor in Wall Street, whose personality would be immediately recognized if we were permitted to print his real name.

He lives on Boston Road, in the Bronx, and is acknowledged to have the most charming wife—once Loretta Bond—in the borough.

In all respects he is admitted to be a shining example of one who got there—THE PLUCKIEST BOY OF THEM ALL.

THE END.

Read "BOUND TO WIN; OR, THE BOY WHO GOT RICH," which will be the next number (23) of "Fame and Fortune Weekly."

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